

## **AFISAP Guatemala Acceptance Speech Delivered by Milton Garcia**

In 1989, Guatemala enacted the Protected Areas Law contained in Decree 4-89 which is a legal instrument that organizes protected areas across the country and creates the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), which is responsible for the conservation, management, and operation and licensing of activities related to natural and cultural resources of our country.

In 1990, taking into consideration that the northern department of Petén, Guatemala, had ecosystems, natural phenomena and species of flora and fauna of special importance, as well as archaeological sites of Mayan culture, which required management and protection, through Decree No. 5-90, the Government established the Maya Biosphere Reserve to conserve the area's biological and cultural wonders while improving the livelihoods of local inhabitants.

Both legal instruments regulated the work for the government, individuals and legal, environmental institutions and cooperatives that will be involved in the management and protection of natural and cultural resources, existing in the department of Petén, Guatemala.

In 1996 a group of enthusiastic citizens of the community of San Andrés, Petén, decided to form a Management Committee. In the beginning the goal was to manage 200,000 hectares of forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, mainly in San Andrés, Petén community. It was not an easy task, because it was required to do so, comply with a series of legal requirements in the public bidding process. However, we were aware of the value representing the natural and cultural resources that exist in our community, and could be management in rational, conscious and responsible way in order to generate employment, raise living standards and eradicate poverty in our community.

In 1999 the committee became legally recognized as a non-profit institution called Asociación Forestal Integral San Andrés, Petén –AFISAP-, and the National Council of Protected Areas gave into concession a total of 51,939.84 hectares of forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

During the eleven years of forest management AFISAP has counted with the approval of the National Council of Protected Areas and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council through SMARTWOOD.

The main economic activities performed by AFISAP are certified xate palm, chewing gum peak and timber products. For these activities we have scrounged the necessary equipment which can improve production processes, and transferred to national and international markets.

Owing to the impacts of our work AFISAP has become a community organization model in forest management giving employment opportunities related to forest management of timber and non-timber products allowing us to invest in social

development and forest protection initiatives. Our forest community have also yielded better results in terms of deforestation and forest fires than a majority of the protected areas included in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

Because of the above mentioned we are very happy, however every day we face different kind of threats like population growth, ranching, agriculture, forest fires and climate change, among others.

I want to express personally and on behalf of each of the members of my community AFISAP, our sincere gratitude for the recognition that is given to us and I call on people around the world to join efforts to conserve the natural resources of our world which God has blessed us.