

## **Global Ecotourism Conference 2007**

### **Some highlights of the conference and how those could be of interest to Fredskorpset, FK, Norway**

The Global Ecotourism Conference 2007 was held from 14-16<sup>th</sup> May, 2007 at the Hollmenkollan Park Reica Hotel in Oslo, Norway. It was concluded successfully with very positive outcomes. The conference was attended by over 460 participants from around 70 countries, and the following national and regional ecotourism associations were represented at the conference.

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, Swedish Ecotourism Society, Association of Ecotourism in Romania, Belarusian Ecotourism Association, CANAECO, EcoBrasil, Ecotourism Australia, Ecotourisme France, Ecotourism Kenya, Ecotourism Laos, Ecotourism Norway, Estonian Ecotourism Association, Japan Ecolodge Association, Japan Ecotourism Society, Kamchatka Ecotourism Society.

Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) was represented by Palitha Fredrick De Silva Gurusinghe, founder President of SLEF. Palitha also an active FK Partner, since 2003 to the date, and the first Chairman of the FK Sri Lanka Network.

Except Sri Lanka, there was very little or no representation at all, at this Global Ecotourism Conference from the Asia-Pacific Regional Ecotourism Associations. The SLEFI personally believes the cost of attending this type of Global Ecotourism Conference was prohibitive for the representatives of ecotourism associations of the developing countries in South, South Asia and Pacific region, unless funded by an organization or by their respective governments. In this sense, the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation was fortunate to have funding support from the Fredskorpset, Norway, SLEF's long time main international partner.

In view of this global ecotourism conference, the SLEF has prepared several publications in print and electronic format which have been distributed among the participants. In these publications SLEF had highlighted the tremendous support and guidance received from the FK during past five years in mapping out and implementation of various ecotourism projects that immensely heled to eradicate poverty in Sri Lanka and strengthening of institutional capacity of national ecotourism organization-SLEF, in Sri Lanka. When the President of SLEF met Mr. Helge Espe in Oslo, he was able to hand over the copies of those publications for the observation of FK. Some of these publications could now be accessed through the SLEF updated website [www.ecotourismsrilanka.net](http://www.ecotourismsrilanka.net)

The President of SLEF had informal discussions and interactions with not only the representatives of ecotourism associations around the world, but also with the individual representatives from different parts of the world, such as Asia, Africa, Latina America, Japan, Europe and USA. Since the SLEF was sponsored by the FK, the representatives wanted to learn and know about FK role, missions existing in their respective countries. So the President, SLEF had an opportunity to brief them on how the FK is trying to

'Bringing People Together' in different parts of the world. The SLEF was proud to mention that the organization had an opportunity to represent Sri Lanka in FK forums in Norway, twice, thanks to FK Partnership. As mentioned above, in the print and electronic brochures distributed by the SLEF during the conference, the FK support extended to promote ecotourism in Sri Lanka was highlighted.

Through the new contacts the SLEF secured during the conference would be helpful to FK, in case the FK wishes to create an ecotourism network within the existing fold of the FK Network around the world. As a result of the Global Ecotourism Conference, the SLEF was able to build up friendly contacts with the public, private organizations in different countries of the world that could be used to establish new FK Programmes.

During the workshop sessions of the conference, the President of SLEF has found various Subjects, Themes, Focus Areas which are of much similar to those of FK Programmes, such as, 'Local Partnerships for Community Based Ecotourism', 'Addressing the Poverty and Sustainable Development through Ecotourism', "Climate Change", 'Peace Building and Ecotourism'. Based on these developments, the SLEF wishes to suggest that FK could initiate new approaches to FK Programmes based on Ecotourism concepts.

In conclusion, the SLEF wishes to thank Mr. Tor Elden, Director General, FK and the Helge Espe, Deputy Director General FK, for financially supporting its President, Mr. Palitha Gurusinghe to represent Sri Lanka at this important global ecotourism conference. If not for FK support, the SLEF would not have an opportunity to represent Sri Lanka.