



May 2008

Dear colleagues,

I have just returned from a short visit to Nairobi at the invitation of UNEP, to participate, with Kevin Urama (ASEE President) and Anantha Duraiappah (our partner at UNEP), in a remarkable series of discussions on integrating economics into UNEP's priority areas. I take advantage of this visit to bring you all up to date on the ISEE 2008 Nairobi conference status and respond to visitors' expectations on coming to Kenya in light of the disturbances earlier this year.

This was my first visit to Kenya (indeed to Africa). I found Nairobi a congenial, arboreal city with a medium sized flavor despite its over 4 million metropolitan inhabitants, with a pleasant climate (at over 1,660 meters, a bit over 1 mile high, its temperatures range from 15-25 C.) - it should be a shade cooler in August as it lies south of the equator. The UN campus where our conference will be held is in a nearby suburb, flanked by embassies and other international organizations such as ICRAF (host of our overflow sessions). The shaded campus is pleasant to walk through; the buildings are all under two stories and fit well into the landscape. UNEP was created here in the mid-1970s based on agreements in Stockholm, and was joined by Habitat and the regional offices of other UN agencies.

Conference participants will be relieved to hear that any signs of the disturbances that afflicted Kenya after its conflictual presidential elections at the end of 2007 have diminished substantially. So much so that the State Department of the US has relaxed its former travel advisory warning to visitors, posting the following text: "Threats of political demonstrations and violence have dramatically receded following the widely accepted power-sharing agreement signed on February 28. The U.S. Department of State has rescinded the authorized departure order for Kisumu and environs and USG personnel and families are able to return there. The temporary suspension of the United States Peace Corps program in Kenya is under review with the goal of resuming the program in the near future..." (Posted March 21). We understand other nations' foreign ministries have followed suit in relaxing travel advisories.

The sensation one has is that of visiting any third world city, particularly one with some degree of prosperity: homeowners organize local security arrangements. But otherwise, everything felt pretty as normal as one could expect (of course, I live in Rio...).

Visitors will appreciate that Kenya is known for its abundant and diverse wildlife. The "big five" (elephant, lion, buffalo, rhino and hippo) may be viewed in the adjacent Nairobi National Park, just a few minutes from the city center. I personally was able to see all of these (except hippos, who were hiding in their pool in the early morning) and more (giraffe, several species of gazelle, monkeys, warthogs, a colorful array of birds...) A bit further afield, the Lake Naivasha flamingo reserve and the great Maasai Mara wildlife migration between Kenya and Tanzania (which is classed amongst the seven wonders of the world) is at its peak in August. Book early! (We will be providing tour options shortly on the conference venue site.)

I was also able to visit one of the hotels in which we are reserving blocks of rooms for the conference (Hilton Nairobi) which has a 5 star treat on offer: large rooms, hot swimming pool, restaurants and bars, residence lounge, meeting facilities, health spa with gyms, manicures, sauna, etc, all inclusive in a reasonable rate which the Local Organizing Committee has managed to negotiate for conference participants. Other hotels in lower prices ranges have also been reserved. Details on hotels and booking procedures will be posted to the conference website shortly.

We are finalizing our review of the some 370 abstracts submitted by ecological economists, and will shortly be getting back in touch with participants to inform of booking arrangements, conference registration and other issues of immediate concern. It promises to be an exciting and productive conference.

Look forward to seeing you all in Nairobi!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter May', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter May
President, ISEE

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