



Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil, May 22nd 2014

Mr. Richard Deverell

Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

c.c. Chairman of the Board of Trustees: Mr Marcus Agius

c.c. Director of Science: Prof. Kathy Willis

Dear Mr Deverell

We are writing to you, in our capacity as representing the botanical community of Latin America through the Latin-American Botanical Association, to express our extreme concern over the cuts in funding envisaged in the budget of the Royal Botanical Garden Kew.

The Latin-American Botanical Association (ALB) represents more than 600 members from Latin America, from countries in Central America, South America and in the Caribbean, as well as from other regions of the world, including several research scientists who are current or retired members of staff from the Royal Botanic Gardens de Kew. The primary objective of ALB is to bring together research scientists, students and members of the general public, who study plants from various aspects, involving systematics, anatomy, physiology, phytochemistry and ecology. Every four years, there is an ALB Congress, in one of the Latin-American countries, when over a 1000 botanists convene, to discuss advances in our scientific knowledge of the flora of the New World tropics and subtropics. Also, many of our members are responsible for the formation of young student botanists, and the university master's and doctoral courses which they provide, in many Latin-American countries.

Latin America possesses the largest biodiversity of the planet, with a regional and indeed world responsibility not only to study it, but most importantly to promote its conservation and sustainable use. To this end, the relevant institutions of the region, in association with in Europe and North America, have played a fundamental part, in which over very many years, the Royal Botanic Gardens de Kew has assumed a leading role.

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scientists from various European countries visited Latin-America and made collections of many new species, which were described and their type specimens deposited in European herbaria. From the earliest days, due to the expertise of its taxonomists, the Royal Botanic Gardens de Kew, gain much respect world-wide and became the focal point for the study of these plants. Thus, at the present time, it holds the largest collection of type materials from the region, making it an essential site for the study and development of any taxonomic account. For this reason, major projects, such as LAPI (Latin-American Plant Initiative), Data Repatriation of Mexican Specimens, and REFLORA for Brazil, have the Kew Herbarium as their center of activity. Demands for the Flora do Brasil on line, Flora Neotropica and the World Flora on line can only be met with the participation of Kew, and the ready availability of its collections.

In this century, the study of DNA sequences of living organisms and their phylogeny have become an indispensable tool for whatever line of research. In terms of plants, it is again RBG



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Kew who is in the vanguard of such research, through the Jodrell Laboratory, leading the way nationally and internationally, attracting collaboration and joint scientific papers, as well as training researchers from many different countries. As regards Latin-America, almost all countries have had professional researchers and their students associated with Kew.

The new millennium generated many new ideas and proposals for new innovative projects. One of these, instituted by RBG Kew, was the highly successful Millennium Seed Bank Project, in which there has been significant participation by Latin-American institutions.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew is a bi-centenarian institution, which is at the same time both traditional and innovative, maintaining in its care treasures such as the plant specimens curated in the herbarium, the magnificent living collections of species from all over the world, and conserved seeds which will ensure the future survival of endangered gene pools, and the DNA bank which permits the comparative study of living organisms based on their phylogeny.

Owing to its outstanding world importance as a center of botanical research, and with its special significance for Latin America, we view with much concern, the present situation, with planned cuts in the grant that maintains the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, and which envisages the dismissal of up to 100 staff members, especially in the area of research, as has been divulged in the media. These cuts will affect not only ongoing projects at Kew, but future partnerships with the scientific community worldwide. For all the reasons given above, we ask you to look for alternative solutions, which will ensure the preservation of the institution and its professionals.

Yours sincerely

Prof. Dr. Ana Maria Giulietti-Harley (Brazil), President of the ALB and of the Administrative Council.

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