

Cristián Samper

Cristián Samper, a biologist and international authority on environmental policy, is the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. As director of the National Museum of Natural History, Samper is responsible for the largest natural history collection in the world and a museum that welcomes more than six million visitors each year. Dr. Samper also served as Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian from March 2007 through June 2008. As Acting Secretary, he guided the Institution through a transition period, working with the Board of Regents on comprehensive governance review and reform, as well as enhanced communications with key stakeholders. Prior to coming to Washington, D.C., Samper, was deputy director and staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, the largest research facility for tropical biology, with emphasis on tropical forests and coral reefs, from 2001 to 2003.

From 1999 to 2001, he was chairman of the Subsidiary Body of Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In this role, Samper helped develop a global strategy for plant conservation and launched the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, designed to determine the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and provide the scientific basis for action to conserve and use ecosystems sustainably. From 1995 to 2001, Samper was the founder and first director of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, the national biodiversity research institute of Colombia. He was responsible for developing the National Biodiversity Policy for Colombia, promoting research on biological inventories, conservation biology and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Known for his work in the ecology of the Andean cloud forests, conservation biology and environmental policy, Samper currently sits on the Boards of Directors for the American Association of Museums, the Center for International Forest Research, the Nature Conservancy, and the World Wildlife Fund.