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Remembrance of Our Friend, Sandy Davis

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How will we remember a person as complex, so high and yet so humble, as Sandy Davis?

Many of our World Bank colleagues have highlighted his academic and professional achievements; his advocacy of the most vulnerable people in society: indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, women and youth; and his efforts to make the Bank an institution more responsive to human rights.

Robert Goodland, talking about Sandy's early work at the Bank, says: "What I remember best about Sandy was his passion for the oppressed. He was totally engaged, fearless and honorable throughout our quarter century together. We have lost a dedicated and irreplaceable professional. Indigenous Peoples have lost one of their staunchest advocates."

And he adds: "I was thrilled in 1987 when Sandy agreed to join the very first Social and Environment Division of LAC (the Latin American and Caribbean Region). We fielded the Bank's strongest social science team at the time, namely Sandy and Maritta Koch-Weser. Between them they forcefully implemented the Bank's Indigenous Peoples Policy, such that a year or so later the Brazilian Government told us that LAC had financed more than half of all Brazil's Indigenous Reserves!"

Maritta Koch-Weser had written Sandy a letter, saying, among other things: "You will remain in our memory as the most shining example of rectitude, untiring dedication, hard work, and purpose; and as a fighter, when challenged."

She goes on to say: "I recall that it was not at all easy for you, in moral terms, to agree to do any work with the World Bank—initially as consultant, and later for many years as a staff member. You were and remained highly distrustful and vigilant regarding the institution at large. You knew that you represented the exception, not the rule. Your struggle for the Indigenous cause achieved tangible results in many regions of the world. Those achievements must not be allowed to be rolled back. And many goals remain to be achieved yet. In your memory, next generations of professionals will be inspired to continue to make a difference for indigenous people."

Bill Partridge, in turn, remembers that: "From his radical rendering of the ongoing indigenous genocide in the Americas at the Anthropology Resource Center, which he founded, to the World Bank where he was the principal author of the Bank's policy on Indigenous Peoples, Sandy left an indelible mark upon the

profession of Anthropology. He left to his academic colleagues to debate ‘how many cross-cousins can dance on the head of a pin’ (to quote Margaret Mead) and took on the struggle for minority rights—territorial rights, linguistic rights, cultural rights—as his professional mission...Most remarkably, given the human tragedies to which he bore witness, Sandy did all this in good humor, without malice; generously, gently, with an unflinching moral force the likes of which we will not see again.”

I had the privilege of collaborating with Sandy for over twenty years on social development issues in general and indigenous peoples’ issues in particular, both discussing policy formulation and application, working in the field, co-authoring several publications and even dreaming about writing a book about our experiences working with indigenous peoples. On a personal note and on behalf of many World Bank friends, colleagues and collaborators (Valeria Pena, Estanislao Gacitua, Juan Martinez, Elena Carrea, Josefina Stubbs, Navin Rai, Cristina Tumale, to name just a few), I would like to highlight a more personal quality: Sandy as a friend.

I had the pleasure of meeting Sandy by 1988 in Quito, Ecuador, when he recruited my help in preparing a study of development and conservation issues in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and the first impression I felt when meeting Sandy for the first time was that of finding “*un viejo amigo*” (an old friend), somebody who knows you, greets you with a smile and tries to make you feel at ease. This first impression has been shared by many of my colleagues.

Over time, we learned about Sandy’s well-earned professional standing: his teaching skills, his advocacy of social issues and how, like the Apostle Paul who had a divine revelation on the road to Damascus, Sandy heard the calling of the Maya spirits on the road to Santa Eulalia, Guatemala. We also found that, despite his broad knowledge, he was always trying to learn from others. And that, no matter what task you had to carry out, small or big, he was always supportive of you. No wonder that his favorite words when referring to other people’s work were “that is fabulous.”

We respected and admired Sandy for both his professional and personal qualities to the point that, about ten years ago, when we learned that his confirmation in the position of Social Development Sector Leader in the Latin America and Caribbean Region was in doubt, we started a letter-writing campaign to the Regional Vice President and, as a result, Sandy became one of the few sector managers in the World Bank to be selected with the support of the majority of his peers.

Sandy was a compassionate man. He was so concerned about other people that in one of the many occasions he and I have shared with indigenous communities in Ecuador, after a long and difficult meeting, people ended up referring to him as “*reverendo*,” (reverend/priest), probably because listening to

him, some indigenous young people awarded Sandy the title of “*anciano*” (elder) in recognition of his profound wisdom and respect for traditional cultural values. As a consequence, the elders ended up calling him “*hermano*” (brother).

Indeed, Sandy was all of the above and, those of us who knew him at the World Bank will always remember him as a great human being, and authentic person who had a high mission in life, *and a fabulous friend*.