

Working For Progress: CSD's Review of Global Forest Issues

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Canada's Ambassador for the Environment

Canada is one of only a few nations to have an Ambassador for the Environment, so my recent appointment to the position is an honour that I have accepted with great enthusiasm. It is the natural extension of personal and professional interests that began in my youth. I worked on environmental issues during my legal career, then as a parliamentarian. As Environment Minister, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Speaker of Canada's House of Commons, I have had a long involvement in environmental issues at a domestic and international level.

I have taken this role on at a critical time. We have truly come to understand the complexity of sustainable development, and the need for balances that respect our long-term environmental and economic needs. One issue that is close to home for me is improving our forest policies and practices. My home is British Columbia, a province with some of Canada's most spectacular forests. Large areas have been set aside because we value forests for recreation and understand the need to preserve wilderness. That process has accelerated as we have learned more about the importance of forests to concerns such as biological diversity, global warming, and fish habitats. At the same time, forests have been a traditional engine of our economy, a source for lumber, pulp and paper. The efforts to find a balance among these values has been a focus of domestic policy.

Our foreign policy agenda has included a goal of international rules on sustainable forest management. These would form a

global framework that can help all countries move toward better forest policies and practices. At a practical level, these would guide local decision makers as they define, implement and measure sustainable forest management. We had hoped to achieve these rules at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). That effort broke down over serious disagreements between developed and developing countries. UNCED did achieve a set of non-binding "Forest Principles" and a chapter on forests in Agenda 21.

Since UNCED, many governments, international organizations and NGOs have attempted to move the debate ahead. Examples include the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Seminar on Temperate and Boreal Forests in Montréal, the second Ministerial Meeting on Forests in Europe, the Indo-British Initiative, follow-up work by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the renegotiation of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), the work of the Forest Stewardship Council and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and recent meetings of environment ministers in India, Italy and my home community, Vancouver. While all are potentially valuable, we believe their impact will be most significant if they can contribute to the work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) when it reviews forest issues in 1995.

Canada and Malaysia have already begun to look ahead to that meeting. We are working to create a basis for progress on forest issues by identifying as much common

ground as possible beforehand. We have invited 14 countries, three intergovernmental organizations and five NGOs to participate in an Intergovernmental Working Group on Forests. The Working Group will first meet in Kuala Lumpur in April 1994, and will meet in Canada later in the year. Its objective is to lay the basis for a productive review of forest issues at the 1995 CSD meeting by renewing the global policy dialogue around six issues: Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management; Trade and Environment; Financial Resources and Technology; Forest Conservation; Enhancing Forest Cover and Productivity; and Links to Other International Processes.

We expect to present the results of the first meeting of the Working Group during the high-level session of the 1994 CSD meeting. This should pave the way for CSD support of the Working Group. We will also be able to determine how other international initiatives will relate to the next stage of the Working Group's discussions.

Forest issues offer a good example of the balance that sustainable development policies seek. They also offer a sense of the cooperation needed among all countries for international efforts to work. Canada and Malaysia will cooperate on this important issue because we believe we can help the CSD act as a catalyst on this critical sustainable development issue. 1995 gives the world another chance at progress on forests. We can't afford to do less than our best to make the most of this opportunity.