

Rio Moves Ahead:

Progress on the Biodiversity Front

The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological

Diversity met in Nassau, the Bahamas, from November 28 to December 9, 1994. The

Convention, opened for signature at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, currently has 114 parties.

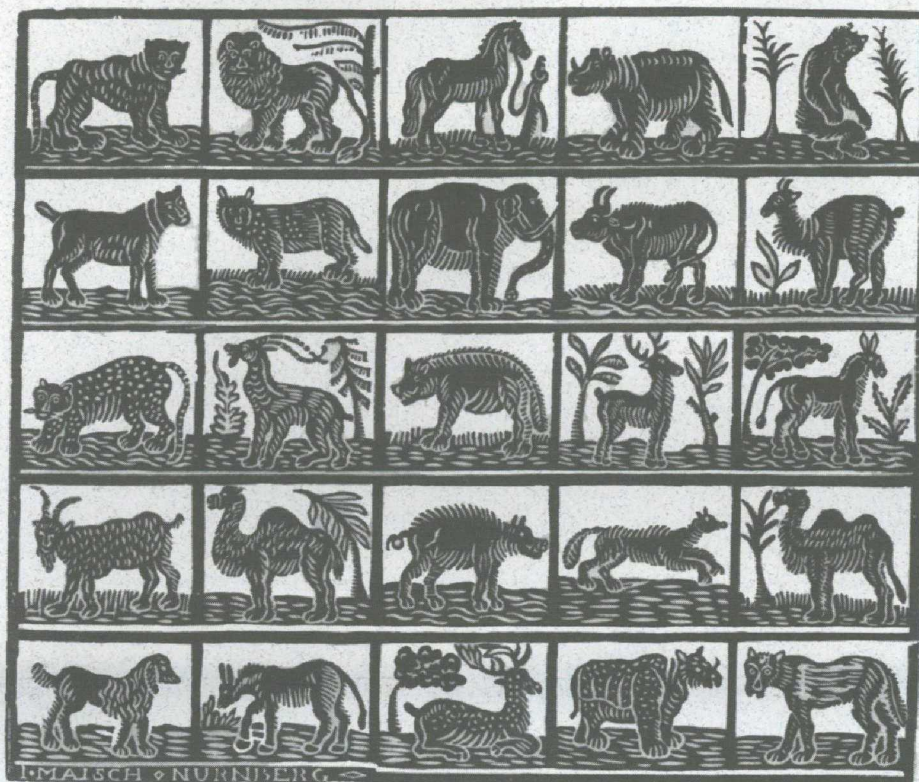
The meeting established a three-year work plan for advancing the biodiversity conservation. The parties recommended that the UN declare December 29 the annual International Day for Biodiversity. The parties will meet again in 1995 to continue their work.

A highlight of the Conference was the Biodiversity Technology Fair organized by Canada. The Fair show-cased products and services for biodiversity management. Organizers and exhibitors declared the Fair a success and are considering making it a regular part of future Conferences.

Work is also proceeding on another Rio initiative, the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. The first meeting of its 154 signatories was held at the end of March in Berlin. ❁

"Canada has a particular role in defending and developing the Arctic environment, an area where international cooperation is vital and is just beginning. Through enhanced international cooperation and national commitment, demonstrated through our recent appointment of the Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs, we will seek to slow the process of global climate change and to protect and improve the Arctic environment and the health and livelihoods of the region's inhabitants."

Canada in the World, Government Statement, p. 19



Arctic Environment Meeting in Iqaluit

Special attention has been paid to the Arctic in the new foreign policy framework. To emphasize its commitment to action, Canada has created the position of Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs.

Mary Simon, an Inuk from Northern Quebec, has led the way in raising the profile of Arctic and Aboriginal issues. From 1986 to 1992, she was President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. In her new role, she led the Canadian delegation to the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS) meeting in Iqaluit, Northwest Territories, from March 15 to 17.

The AEPS focusses primarily on research into Arctic environmental issues. However, as Ambassador Simon notes, "We hope to build on the AEPS through the creation of an Arctic Council. It will be made up of the eight Arctic states and will provide for the direct participation of a number of Arctic Aboriginal organizations. We believe the Council could consider a wide range of issues such as health, social matters, economic development, cultural exchange, tourism, transport and communications systems, and circumpolar trade." ❁

G-7 Environment Ministers Come to Canada

The G-7 group of industrialized countries plays an important role in world affairs. Canada's G-7 membership allows it to contribute to activities in a variety of fields of common concern, including the environment and sustainable development.

Canada will host a meeting of G-7 environment ministers and representatives of the European Commission and the United Nations Environment Program in Hamilton, Ontario, from April 29 to May 1, 1995. Its purpose is threefold:

- to review the efforts of G-7 governments to integrate environmental and economic considerations into their decision making;
- to examine the role and efficacy of international institutions as they pertain to the environment and sustainable development; and
- to examine global issues of concern, notably climate change, biodiversity and the management of toxic substances.

Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Environment Minister, Sheila Copps, will chair the meeting. It will be a chance to share Canada's experience in integrating the environment and the economy and to focus on the steps the Canadian government is taking to improve the environmental performance of its own operations. ❁

In Search of Greater Commitment

by the Honourable John Fraser, PC, QC
Canada's Ambassador for Environment and Sustainable Development

This year, 1995, marks the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. For all its imperfections, the UN has played an important role in building a more peaceful world during the past half-century, and has responded to emerging issues such as the environment and sustainable development.

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development was a milestone in addressing these issues globally. Three years later, the world is striving to attain the goals we set in Rio.

The next session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will take place in New York from April 11 to 28. It provides an opportunity to measure our progress to date in achieving sustainable development and to look at the steps we take from here.

While the CSD has begun the important work of assessing achievements in implementing Rio's results, more can be done to make it a more effective body. For example, we need a greater political commitment to the work of the CSD, such as having ministers in addition to the Ministers of the Environment attend the High Level Session, and by continuing to press for the High Level Session to be a forum for a real exchange of views between ministers.

The annual national reports to the CSD have been useful. They are a storehouse of information and experiences to which the world should have better access. Better accessibility to the information

could be achieved by adopting internationally accepted indicators of sustainable development. The CSD can help push the world community in that direction, building on its ongoing activities.

Forests will be an important topic on this year's CSD agenda. The Ad Hoc Working Group of the CSD on Sectoral Issues, which met February 27 to March 3 in New York, recommended that the April regular session of the CSD create an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. While its full program of work must be fleshed out, it would be open-ended and transparent, and draw together a wide range of international work on international forest issues to help determine what future international action is necessary. Canada wants to see the proposed panel deal with such key issues as criteria and indicators, voluntary timber certification schemes and national forest action plans.

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In the long term, Canada would like to see an international convention for all types of forests and forest values. However, we are conscious that much work needs to be done before the international community is ready to launch the negotiation of such a Convention. We hope that the proposed CSD panel can help flesh out the options in this regard. Canada expects to be a very active participant in its work. ❁