

A Course for the Future

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The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created by last fall's session of the UN General Assembly to ensure and review the implementation of *Agenda 21* and other agreements adopted at Rio's Earth Summit, and to enhance the role of the UN and all its bodies in the environmental and developmental sphere.

Its place in the UN system is as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, similar in structure and procedure to bodies such as the UN Commission on Human Rights. It is an intergovernmental body of 53 UN member states, elected for two-year terms. The Commission, headquartered in New York, will meet for the first time from June 14 to 25, 1993.

At the organizational meeting held in February 1993, Canada was elected to the CSD, and a Bureau for the CSD was also established. The Bureau is chaired by Ambassador Razali of Malaysia, who played an active role at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and at the last UN General Assembly. As a Vice-Chair of the Bureau over the next year, I will work closely with Ambassador Razali in moving forward the work of the Commission.

Developing a Blueprint

The CSD's priority for its first year of operation is to build a practical workplan for the future. To achieve this, it will be necessary for the CSD to set guidelines for the information required from governments, other UN organizations and groups outside of the UN; develop methods of opera-

tion for the future work of the Commission; explore ways and means of assisting countries in preparing national action plans; and determine how the review of *Agenda 21* is best handled. *Agenda 21* and the other Rio documents would be divided by theme into "clusters" of issues. Some clusters would be looked at every year, while others would come up for discussion at least once before 1997. A general review of all clusters is planned for 1997, the fifth anniversary of UNCED.

Proposed "Clusters"

- Critical elements of sustainability
- Financial resources and mechanisms
- Education, science, the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and co-operation and capacity building
- Decision-making structures
- Role of major groups, including other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Health, human settlements and fresh water
- Land desertification, forests and biodiversity
- Atmosphere, oceans and all kinds of seas
- Toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes

Each annual session of the CSD will include a high-level meeting of Ministers to provide continuing and direct political involvement in setting the direction and priorities for the Commission and to consider emerging policy issues. It is hoped that the first such high-level meeting will take place June 23 and 24, 1993.

Canada's Priorities

As work progresses on the key issues identified by the CSD, Canada

will work to ensure that our priorities are considered and integrated into the Commission's recommendations and reports. Our goals build on the commitments that Canada made at the Earth Summit. They are:

- to encourage the development of national reports and plans;
- to ensure transparency in the Commission's work by involving indigenous, business and scientific groups;
- to provide impetus for the development of new international law;
- to build co-operation on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests; and
- to support the work of the UN Conference on High Seas Fishing.

Canada is working particularly hard to ensure that the voices and opinions of the broad range of NGOs will be distinctly heard by the CSD. Canada was very supportive of the involvement of NGOs in the UNCED process and continues to support the need for NGO involvement in the work of the Commission.

Framework for the Future

The Commission on Sustainable Development is charged with bringing to life the agreements adopted at UNCED. Its capacity to meet the goals set for it will hinge on how much we — international organizations, national governments, NGOs, indigenous groups, business and others — invest in it. First, we must identify its objectives and actions, as well as set firm guidelines and benchmarks to measure its performance. Second, we have to accept the obligations that these objectives and deadlines will mean for us, its constituents and members. This will build the foundation for a serious and credible international body able to give practical meaning to the important commitments made at UNCED. ♣