

# A Stockholm call to challenge the peril to man's environment

By H. Dorothy Burwash

During the last few years, "environment" "pollution" and "ecology" have probably become three of the most frequently used words in the English language. There has been mounting concern not only at the loss of traditional amenities — clean beaches, clear streams and pure air — but at the threat to the total environment and to the whole complex network of which man is a part and upon which he relies for life. Particularly in the industrialized countries, where the problems are most acute, much action has been initiated at the national level.

In Canada, the federal Department of the Environment finally came into being during 1971 and several provinces have also established governmental machinery for the purpose. At the federal level, stricter standards have been adopted with the passing of the Canada Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Air Pollution Control Act and others.

Action at the international level is necessarily less direct. There must first be developed among sovereign states a common view and will to act before international "legislation" is possible in the form of treaties and conventions by which the signatory countries agree to conduct their national activities in such a way as not to endanger an internationally-shared resource like the oceans or the atmosphere. A further outcome of international cooperation can and should be an improved flow of the scientific and technical information basic to any effort to preserve or restore environmental quality.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which is to meet in Stockholm from June 5 to 16 this year, is one among many conferences which have been or will soon be discussing environmental problems. Others include the General Assembly of the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment which met in Canberra in August-September 1971, the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organizations Conference on Marine Pollution from Shipping, scheduled

for 1973, and the Law of the Sea Conference to be held in 1973 or 1974.

The Stockholm Conference differs from all these in two important respects which, taken together, make it unique. It will take place at the intergovernmental (as distinct from private or expert) level and it will consider the entire range of threats to the quality of the human environment. Follow-up action in the form of binding treaties and conventions will in many cases have to be worked out in more specialized meetings such as the Law of the Sea Conference, but the Stockholm gathering is intended to give the essential impetus to an all-out effort to save the human environment from further and perhaps irreversible damage.

More than 130 nations are expected to send delegations to Stockholm next June and, when representatives of other international organizations plus the working staff of the Conference are added, there will probably be something close to 3,000 people in attendance. Preparations, under way for more than two years, are complex and extensive. Unless they are carried out with thoroughness, precision and imagination, the results of the Conference, given its short duration and the large number of participants, could be profoundly disappointing.

Maurice Strong, former president of the Canadian International Development Agency, assumed his duties as Secretary-General of the Conference in November 1970. His main staff or secretariat is in Geneva, with a branch in New York. He is constantly in direct consultation with governments and with co-operating organizations such as the International Council of Scientific Unions. In addition, he works with a 27-nation preparatory committee, of which Canada is a member. The committee has already held three sessions beginning in March 1970, and will hold its fourth and last meeting in New York in March 1972. As is usual in the United Nations, its membership has been carefully worked out to include representatives

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