

EARTH CHARTER

This PrepCom provided the first opportunity for delegations to discuss their views on the Earth Charter, a document envisaged by Maurice Strong as a succinct declaration of universal principles, encapsulating global thinking about environment and development. Since it is now clear that it will be one of the two main documents that leaders will sign at Rio (along with Agenda 21), Earth Charter discussions proved to be a magnet for political attention. Canada, Peru and the USSR kicked off the discussion by tabling their own drafts of an Earth Charter. The Canadian text was widely praised for its brevity and its potential as a basis for future environmental law. However, delegates had many other competing visions, especially LDCs which sought to highlight development principles in the charter. At the end of the PrepCom, a 19 page compendium of views on possible principles for an Earth Charter was compiled. It will be a major challenge at the fourth PrepCom to reduce this list to a politically punchy one or two page document.

AGENDA 21

Agenda 21 also took to life for the first time at this PrepCom. Agenda 21 is intended to be an integrated action plan for governments and international organizations, covering all of the main sectoral issues on the UNCED Agenda. Working Groups I and II spent three weeks negotiating their way through ten separate draft chapters of Agenda 21 prepared by the Secretariat, with variable results. These texts will be extensively revised by the Secretariat before the final PrepCom, to take into account additional suggestions by delegations, and the new structure for Agenda 21 approved at this PrepCom. The CANZ group spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the overall structure of Agenda 21 and proposed that links with the cross-sectoral issues of financing and technology transfer be integrated into each chapter of Agenda 21. The final decision on the structure of Agenda 21 requires that separate chapters on each of the cross-sectoral issues be added as well. Thus, it now appears that Agenda 21 in Rio will be the compendium of action decisions by the PrepCom. Much work will have to be done at the final PrepCom to bring consistency to the structure of Agenda 21.

FORESTS

As in the past two PrepComs, forests were the principal focus of interest in Working Group I, as delegates have agreed that UNCED will be the principal forum for debating global forest issues. Agreement reached at the last PrepCom to work towards a statement of principles on forests by Rio, and defer consideration of a convention until afterwards, reduced previous tensions between G-77 and Western delegations over this issue. Slow but steady progress was made working through the first draft of a text on forest principles. The Canadian draft of forest principles was widely used as a reference point by other delegations. The prospects are good that work will be completed at the fourth PrepCom on a set of principles. However, the Agenda 21 text on forests is yet to be discussed.