

# ENVIRONMENT

## Bridging the Gaps Crucial to Rebuilding Environment

A hortatory rhetoric accompanies the return of environmental issues to the international agenda. It urges reinforcement of education and co-operation, more financial support for developing countries, re-oriented aid activities and an enhanced role for Non-Governmental Organizations. Awareness is a long-term process but we can promote progress, as we wait for a more committed internationalism, by defining issues politically and identifying and promoting co-operative policies.

While all nations seek a common good, geography, history, culture, politics and economics generate different priorities. Developing countries emphasize poverty while developed ones focus on controlling environmental problems linked to industrialization. Scientific uncertainty contributes to disagreement. Societies differ over what they are willing to risk for the sake of other priorities. States often lack objectivity about scientific data, perhaps not wanting to know too much and distrusting the source.

Regardless of long-term benefits, some states and specific groups gain in the short term. Others lose. At the domestic level, this is most evident in NGO calls for more grass-roots participation in decision-making. *How* to conserve the environment is often harder for governments than *whether* or *what* to conserve. Developing countries favour others' subsidies or taxation of multinational corporations; developed countries prefer rules that often require sophisticated administration.

The environmentalists' equation of affluence with degradation, and the insistence of the developed world on the impossibility of expanding resources to raise the standard of living of the developing countries threaten to freeze or increase inequalities.

Yet, progress has been substantial since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. That meeting in Stockholm, and others around the world in the 1970s, promoted awareness, forced governments to define positions or review their behaviour, and improved the bureaucracy of agencies entrusted with the protection of natural and human resources.

Progress in the last two decades has come largely in six ways:

First, crisis and catastrophe were crucial in raising consciousness about oil pollution and spurred governmental and institutional responses. But slow degradation or the absence of a single villain make it difficult for governments to promote drastic measures.

Second, the prospect of unilateral action has been one of the most potent forces for promotion of higher standards. Although oil pollution was a global problem requiring global solutions, the United States was ready in 1978 to do anything to protect its waters. To divert the threat of competitive disadvantages and minimize adverse economic impacts, the industry adopted specific safety measures and promoted harmonization of standards.

Third, linking environmental protection to more widely shared values such as government revenues, health or economic growth has proven indispensable. Health considerations spawned early environmental measures in Western Europe. Linking the protection of natural resources to income such as tourism has also proven effective, provided it was institutionalized. The desire to protect national industries from competition led to non-tariff barriers designed to protect the environment or public health. Canada used environmental justifications to stake its claim to a 200-mile offshore economic management zone.

Fourth, by carrying the financial burden of minimizing pollution, developed countries also have encouraged developing countries' adoption of environmental protection measures. The principles of additionality and compensation called for in Stockholm have been partially implemented through development agencies. The UN Environment Programme has sought to catalyze action by international organizations through modest financial incentives. Significant advances result from a country taking on much of the costs associated with the protection of environmental resources, as did France in the case of the Mediterranean Plan. Although such leadership is rooted mostly in other concerns, such as protecting domestic industry, money greases the wheels of environmental protection. Endorsement of

the 1987 Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer by the developing countries, and Canada's promotion of environmental issues within the *Francophonie* are clear illustrations of this.

Fifth, adoption of a broad definition of the problem was a necessary basis for increased co-operation. Stockholm identified poverty and modernization as the prime causes of environmental degradation in the developing world.

Sixth, the transfer and support of scientific and technical expertise helps to overcome suspicions and facilitates support for environmental programmes. Development of domestic scientific capabilities also creates constituencies that promote environmental objectives. This has been part of the strategies of the World Bank, of bilateral agencies and of NGOs financing creation of national and local associations which would relay their environmental agenda, mobilize the local populations and put pressure on governments.

The last 20 years have seen the environment movement mature. Rather than eschewing traditional politics, it has "dirtied" its hands by building power and coalitions. It discusses taxes, prices, and regulations while recognizing the importance of political feasibility. Many of the suspicions developing countries harboured about environmental issues have disappeared. Weak states also have used the issue to enhance their prestige or to gain visibility.

The keys to progress have been money, leadership, development of domestic constituencies, and determination of solutions reconciling diverse government goals. Canada has expertise and a positive international image. We can lead by marshalling resources, by putting heretofore invisible issues on the international agenda, and mediate between developed and developing nations. We can help to define a new notion of international security that would incorporate the environment. We must address directly the political context of environmental issues and help to steer the debate in directions that would forestall conflicts caused by environmental degradation.

— Philippe Le Prestre is a Professor of Political Science with the University of Quebec at Montreal —

# ENVIRONMENT

## ODA: A Possible Environmental Lever

As host country for the 1987 Montreal Protocol, one of the first truly concerted international efforts to deal with chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) pollution, it was fitting that Canada should play a lead role in this month's London conference at which a more stringent campaign was considered. What was not fitting was the pre-conference bickering over whether what came out of the latest round would be the London Protocol. There was strong resistance from Canada and some other participants because of the perceived loss of face.

The substance of the meeting came close to being relegated to a back seat by the procedural dissent, the last thing that's needed when like-minded countries try to come to grips with such a crucial issue. CFCs deplete the ozone layer, prompting short-term concern about ultraviolet-induced skin cancers and long-term concern about our very existence because of potential genetic and other damage. Concern has been heightened by new evidence that they not only deplete ozone but also contribute substantially to global warming.

As approved by Canada, the United States and 22 other countries, the Montreal Protocol committed the signatories, subject to individual legislative ratification, to halving CFC emissions by 1999. The proposal was predicated on a 1990 production freeze at then current levels, followed by a production cut of 20% by 1994. Before ratifying it with the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in mid-1988, Canada pledged a 20% reduction by 1992, 85% by 1997 and elimination by 2000. Since then, a range of other agents — hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) and methyl chloroform (MCF) — have come into use as environmentally "friendlier" substitutes. However, there is a growing body of scientific evidence to warrant concerns about these others as well as about halons, which are widely used in fire-extinguisher systems to displace oxygen.

They are all covered in a House of Commons' environment committee report, *Deadly Releases*, which stated that even the accelerated programme proposed by the federal government does not go far enough. Under the

chairmanship of David MacDonald, former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister and Canadian ambassador to Ethiopia, the all-party committee urged an 85% reduction by 1995 and elimination by 1997. "Even if all use of CFCs was halted immediately, the atmospheric concentration of the ozone would not return to normal for more than a century", the committee said.

While CFCs are the main culprit, the committee said "all ozone depleting substances must be eliminated from further use worldwide and all such substances must be recovered and destroyed." And, in a refreshing shift from the ideological tunnel-vision that afflicts many environmentalist activists, it said that although "time is of the essence", it acknowledges that wholesale change overnight is impracticable.

The committee plans to address the other agents in a second report which MacDonald hopes will be done by October. For the time being, it recommended a leading role for Canada at the London meeting. The report's release coincided with a joint announcement by Environment Minister Robert de Cotret and External Affairs Minister Joe Clark that Canada would "fully support the adoption of stronger measures" at the London conference. These included creation of an international fund to help the Third World to finance domestic ozone-protection initiatives.

There is a conundrum in that as the developed countries progress toward alternatives, the Third World picks up where we leave off. The fact is that most of the environmentally benign options that companies are exercising in the campaign to do away with CFCs are less fiscally benign. Production costs rise and economic pressures can result in a shift to countries where the need for jobs is more desperate than in the industrialized ones and the concern for the environment less important.

A potential lever in this regard, one that many countries are unwilling to use, is framing Official Development Assistance policies within environmental parameters. Canada's Export Development Corp., for example, operates under no such constraints, a situation that is drawing increasing complaints. The

committee had what MacDonald characterized as "some difference of opinion" with EDC witnesses during its hearings but inferred that the Corporation might have little choice in the matter. "Clearly there is movement in some parts of the government," he said, pointing out that the Canadian International Development Agency "has increasingly realized that that has to be one of the basic criteria."

Marlene Catterall, an Ottawa MP who was the principal Liberal party representative on the committee, added that the aid aspect probably will be addressed "in much more depth" in the second report. "It's not simply a question of environmental criteria for projects we do but, in fact, looking at our priorities for projects and ensuring that they are contributing to long-term reduction of the problems of global contamination."

Apart from that, there is the proposed fund. Estimates of its cost differs. There have been suggestions that approximately \$130 million a year would be sufficient, of which Canada's share would be \$3-5 million. India's Science Minister, Dr. M.G.K. Menon, attending the VIIth Parliamentary and Scientific Conference, June 11-14 in Ottawa, argued that "billions" are necessary. The amount is disputable but the message is not: humanity must pay now or pay much more later — if, indeed, it is in position to do so. British Columbia MP Jim Fulton, the New Democratic Party's environment critic in the House of Commons, put it rather trenchantly during the news conference at which the report was released: "If we can't find \$130 million a year to phase it out by 1997, we are not an intelligent species."

Copies of *Deadly Releases* may be ordered from the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S9. It also is available in limited quantities from the Clerk, Standing Committee on Environment, House of Commons, Ottawa K1A 0A6.