

The Environment

Over the past 25 years, environmental issues have become top priorities on the international agenda. Climate change, ozone depletion, transboundary air pollution, deforestation, desertification, declining fish stocks, persistent organic pollutants and other global environmental problems have forced the international community to respond.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment placed environmental concerns firmly on the international agenda for the first time. As a result of the conference, the United Nations Environment Program was established to co-ordinate and promote action on environmental issues within the UN system.

In April 1987, the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) introduced the term "sustainable development" — the concept that the environment and economic growth are not only compatible but interdependent.

The Earth Summit

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development — known as The Earth Summit — held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, focused on a global environmental agenda for the 21st century (Agenda 21) and ways to foster a global understanding of the interdependence between the environment and development. Members adopted Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration and the Statement of Principles on Forests. Some 150 governments signed conventions on conserving biological diversity and on climate change. Negotiations took place on a desertification convention and on the recently adopted Convention on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. Subsequent G-7 summits have pressed members to fulfil goals established in Rio de Janeiro.

Addressing Environmental Concerns in the G-7

G-7 summits have played a major role in addressing environmental concerns. The 1988 Toronto Summit led to an official endorsement of the principle of sustainable development. In Paris the next year, leaders called for action on climate change, integration of economic and environmental policies, sustainable forestry practices and ocean management. It was also noted that financial and technological assistance was needed to help developing countries take responsible action on the environmental front.

In Houston in 1990, leaders urged that negotiations on climate change and forestry be completed and that a strategy on dealing with land-based sources of marine pollution be developed. They underlined the need to conserve and protect living marine resources and to preserve biodiversity. The summit also