

Environment ministers from summit countries have met informally for the past five years, most recently May 4-6, 1997, in Miami. The meeting focused on the environment as it affects children's health and measures that the Eight have agreed to promote domestically.

The Denver Summit comes in an important year for the international sustainable development agenda, ending one day before the start of a UN General Assembly Special Session on Environment and Development that will review outcomes five years after the 1992 Earth Summit. This message was reinforced in recent discussions in Miami.

UN General Assembly Special Session

The UN General Assembly Special Session on Environment and Development will be held June 23-27 in New York. Leaders from all summit countries are expected to participate. Among key issues for Canada are forests, climate change and fresh water.

Forests

At the Earth Summit in 1992, governments agreed to a non-binding statement of forest principles. However, Canada believed that much more was needed if all of the environmental, economic and social values of forests were to be fully recognized.

A breakthrough occurred in 1994 when Canada and Malaysia agreed to work together in identifying common ground between developed and developing countries. This led to an intergovernmental working group on forests, which helped prepare the way for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to establish the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests in 1995 as a single forum for forest policy discussions. This panel submitted its recommendations to the commission on 11 key policy issues in April 1997.

The panel and associated initiatives have provided the global community with a clearer understanding of forest issues and how to build on the achievements to date. The idea of a legally binding international convention on forests has attracted considerable support as a next step. A decision on the launch of a forest convention, supported by G-7 countries as early as the 1990 Houston Summit, is expected to be taken at the UN General Assembly Special Session. Canada and other countries believe that a convention would

- help formalize an integrated and comprehensive international forest agenda and plan of action;
- encourage greater global commitment to sustainable forest management;