

- At the time of the 1972 Stockholm Conference there was a general belief that once governments agreed to tackle environmental problems, they would make a difference to the future. Today, few share that belief. The problems have proven to be far more complex, intractable and widespread. It is now recognized that intergovernmental agreements must be backed up with firm political commitments to domestic policy reform and financial commitments to increase the capacity of all major actors - including industry and NGOs - to work towards sustainable development, especially within and among developing countries.

(iii) **Achievements of the Stockholm Conference³**

(This issue was discussed in greater detail in the papers prepared for the seminar, in the pages footnoted below).

- In 1972, getting agreement on many issues on the Stockholm Conference agenda was comparatively easier because implementation appeared to require relatively marginal adjustments in national policies and economies. In 1992 the costs of taking or postponing action are far greater, and effective action will require fundamental changes in many policies, laws and institutions both nationally and internationally, as well as changes in public behaviour and expectations.
- Unfortunately, the interplay between national and international institutions has not been as effective in the environmental area as had been hoped. While most countries after Stockholm created environmental agencies, there has been no real change in the way that governments operate, while international institutions in this area remain fairly weak.
- UNEP has performed surprisingly well, in view of the fundamental constraints that it faces.
- Principle 21 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration represented a watershed in international environmental law in acknowledging the sovereign right of states to exploit their own resources and the responsibility of states "to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction". Canada played a central role in the drafting of Principle 21. The conceptual framework provided by Principle 21 has been applied successfully by Canada in other negotiations, and is the legal

³ See Bruce, pp. 12-14 and 18-25 plus Munro, pp. 4-5.