

During the past few years "environment" and "pollution" have become common concerns. People have become aware of the loss of such traditional amenities as pure water and fresh air. People have discovered that, instead of being overwhelmed by his natural environment, man threatens to destroy the biosphere in which he lives. People have begun to demand that their governments face up to the problems of a civilization in which man has both the power to create and the power to destroy. And some say we have only until the year 2,000 to avert a global disaster.

This month's United Nations Conference on the Human Environment marks one high point of public concern with environmental issues. Since the General Assembly convened the Conference in 1968, over one hundred governments have been involved in its preparation. More than seventy governments have presented reports on the state of their national environment. Many governments have established governmental machinery and passed legislation to deal with problems.

Here in Canada the Federal Government has been actively involved in every aspect of the Stockholm Conference preparations.

It has created a Department of the Environment to coordinate its activities in the fields of water management, fisheries, forestry, wildlife, land use and environmental protection. It has established the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs to provide a focus for the identification and control of Canada's urban problems. And it has passed legislation such as the Canada Water Act and the Clean Air Act. (It has signed an agreement with the United States to clean up the Great Lakes. And it has worked on the preparation of an international agreement to deal with the dumping of toxic wastes into the oceans.)

These are worthy accomplishments. But they are not enough in themselves. Environmental problems are international problems and as such they require international solutions.

The problems and proposals which have been placed on the agenda of the Conference which is scheduled to open in two days time in Stockholm are enormous in scope and I would like to discuss a few of them with you today.

Pollution is probably the most obvious of our environmental problems. We discharge vast tonnage of wood fibre, rock and a multitude of chemicals into our rivers and streams. Our factories and cars fill the air with noxious gases. We litter our countryside with garbage. One hundred years ago, the biosphere could absorb these materials and neutralize their effect. Now, however, large-scale modifications of the biosphere are occurring and ecological systems that support life are being overworked.