

Canada worked for the establishment of binding conventions on climate change, conservation of biodiversity, and on sustainable development of all forest types. Also of paramount importance to Canada was the state of the high-seas fishery. At the PrepComs, Canada attempted to get beyond the causes, the finger-pointing, and look to solutions and embody them in a convention on sustainable development of the seas. Canada planned and worked toward an "Earth Charter", a one-page credo or global doctrine that would have succinctly established the concept of sustainable development. Finally, with the knowledge that most developing countries can not afford to pay for the real integration of environmental protection within viable development programs, Canada proposed that assistance be provided to these countries through debt conversion projects and improved North-South trade.

C. THE GLOBAL GOALS

The global objectives were broad and comprehensive. Environmental issues included the protection of air, land and water; conservation of biological diversity, forests, and natural resources; and the sound management of wastes and technology. These goals identified to world leaders the human activities that are threatening the planet, that are bringing about pollution of land, ocean and atmosphere, drought, desertification, thinning of stratospheric ozone, climate change, and the extinction of plant and animal species.¹¹

Also on the agenda were the concerns that have led to serious differences between countries of the North and South: patterns of development that cause stress to the environment, poverty in developing countries, economic growth, unsustainable patterns of consumption, and demographic pressures and their impact on the international economy. Ultimately, the most crucial of issues divided countries of the North from those of the South: the need for fairness in the transfer of resources and technology; and the call for an end to unjust patterns of international trade.

D. WHAT HAPPENED AT RIO?

The Summit was the largest gathering of world leaders ever to take place, and it received a great deal of media coverage around the world. Expectations were high, often too high; and there has been much criticism of the final outcome of UNCED. To the extent that the aim of Rio was really to find ways to bring the developing world out of poverty without contributing to environmental degradation, the conference was not a success. Tim Draimin, of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, quoted Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland,

We owe the world to be frank about what we have achieved here in Rio: progress in many fields, too little progress in most fields, and no progress at all in some fields.¹²

The successful aspects of Rio have to do primarily with the open, transparent and inclusive processes of consultative decision-making which began with the Brundtland Report, and were carried through the preparatory process for UNCED. New leadership, consensus and understanding were developed in the NGO communities: business, labour, environmental groups, women, aboriginal peoples and youth. An unprecedented degree of high-level political involvement and public attention were garnered. These are the sources of the hope that many have expressed since leaving Rio. As the Minister of the Environment, Jean Charest said:

¹¹ "A Greener Commonwealth: Special Earth Summit Edition," *Commonwealth Currents*, June/July 1992, p. 3.

¹² *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Environment*, Issue No. 46, 17 November 1992, p. 9.