

A Foundation for Success

The First Meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

By Arthur H. Campeau, Q.C.

Canada's Ambassador for Environment and Sustainable Development
Vice-Chair of the CSD

The first substantive session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) held in New York in June produced tangible results and a climate for future co-operation. Above all, it established that the CSD enjoys the support of political leaders and a broad range of groups worldwide.

The meeting in New York had two major outcomes. It confirmed the structure and multi-year thematic work plan of the CSD outlined in the last issue of **GLOBAL AGENDA**. It also brought together more than 40 environment ministers who met along with other participants for two days at the end of the session to discuss how they could provide political support to the Commission's goals through concrete actions by their own governments and by the international community. For the CSD, this political dynamic provides a good balance between broad policy perspectives and specific technical issues and ensures that the meetings are more likely to result in firm action being taken.

The result therefore, is an ambitious agenda based on concrete, focussed activities. For example, two intersessional working groups will meet to consider the challenging financial and technology transfer issues. Each will bring together facts, develop analyses and focus on the practical considerations. In

addition to the two working groups, many countries have offered to host meetings on topics relevant to the CSD's short-term work plan, such as fresh water, health, human settlements and waste. This process should advance these issues substantially for next year's meeting.

"The challenge before the Commission is to demonstrate to the world that the political will which led to the agreements of Rio will continue to guide the implementation of these agreements."

Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development

The importance of reporting by national governments was also emphasized. Since the global sustainable development agenda depends as much on regional, national and local initiatives as it does on international ones, this will ensure a good balance of commitment in implementation efforts.

Another important outcome of the meeting was the high degree of North-South co-operation that emerged in the wake of Rio. This is a key element to the success of the global sustainable development agenda.

Canada played an active role in helping to achieve the success of this meeting. We stressed the value of round

tables as a means of forging consensus on major issues. For example, we have proposed a round table on sustainable cities in conjunction with Globe '94 to be held in Vancouver in March 1994. We also offered the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg as an informal forum in which key CSD members can build consensus on trade and sustainable development issues.

Another contribution was our idea of living laboratories, models for achieving sustainable development. For example, our network of model forests could be used to pool knowledge on this vital part of the global environment.

As in Rio, one valuable aspect of the work of the CSD was the productive and responsible involvement of non-governmental organizations. They took an active and persuasive approach to issues, underlining the value of their participation. Their involvement has already had an impact on CSD actions and its base of support.

The meeting in New York gave the CSD the tools to fulfil its mandate and demonstrated that the will is there to use those tools effectively. The task is now to take the success to date and translate it into concrete results. 