

elaborate strategies and measures to halt and reverse the effects of environmental degradation in the context of increased national and international efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries.⁸

The first UN Conference on Environment and Development—UNCED for short, but better known as the “Earth Summit” after its final three days—was the culmination of two and a half years of world-wide consultation. The conference was attended by representatives of 178 nations, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other interested parties (approximately 30,000 in total, including members of the media). Although successful as an assembly, in that so many heads of state and other participants were present, the conference failed to produce firm commitments by governments, either to specific targets in international agreements, or to specific levels of funding.

After the Brundtland Report was released in 1987, it became clear that the developed countries of the North understood it to be a document about environmental problems, while the developing countries of the South saw it as a development study. This dichotomy was not resolved at Rio. Although neither the development side nor the environment side were left out of the conference there was a failure to really integrate the two separate agendas as part of one inextricable relationship. As Christine Debrah, former Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Council of Ghana, has said,

The underlying causes of the crisis of our civilization—the disparity between rich and poor, between developing and developed nations, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and, most importantly, population growth—have not really changed and would need a much greater political commitment from world leaders as well as individual citizens.⁹

B. CANADIAN PREPARATION AND GOALS

Canada's preparations for the Earth Summit were coordinated by the National Secretariat in cooperation with Environment Canada and External Affairs and International Trade Canada (EAITC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The preparations also received input from a large number of interest groups connected to the environment, development, business, industry, labour, the churches, universities, women, natives, and youth, as well as all levels of government.¹⁰

An interdepartmental committee on UNCED was established and co-chaired by Environment Canada and EAITC with representation from 20 federal departments and agencies. This group was responsible for coordinating the federal government's preparations for both UNCED and the International Preparatory Committee Meetings (PrepComs). Groups were organized to address each of Agenda 21's 115 issues, synthesizing departmental interests into drafts of the Canadian positions and identifying desirable outcomes from UNCED. Recognizing the need to hear from all stakeholders, the Canadian government financially assisted the formation of the Canadian Participatory Committee for UNCED. This Committee coordinated the participation of approximately thirty NGO groups.

Canada attended the PrepComs with specific objectives in mind. Canada emphasized the importance of national reports, and provided assistance to Indonesia, Guinee Conakry, Nigeria, Peru and the Central American region in the preparation of their national reports for UNCED.

⁸ United Nations Resolution 44/228, part 1.3, New York, 22 December 1989.

⁹ Lt. Col. (Rtd.) Christine K. Debrah, “The Earth Summit and the South”, *Rio Reviews*, Geneva, The Centre for Our Common Future, 1992, p. 10.

¹⁰ Environment Canada, “Canada and the Earth Summit, Green Plan Goes Global,” 1991.