

ENVIRONMENT

In just 20 years, environmental issues have become top priorities on the international agenda. Once seen as mostly local, environmental problems now are recognized as having a global impact. Climate change, ozone depletion, transboundary air pollution (acid rain), deforestation, desertification, mismanagement of marine resources, and other global environmental issues have forced the international community to respond.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment placed environmental concerns firmly on the international agenda for the first time. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was set up as a result of this conference. UNEP's job is to co-ordinate and promote action on environmental issues within the UN system.

In April 1987, the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) was issued. It was a watershed in environmental discussions and introduced the concept of "sustainable development" to the world. The term means "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The report emphasized that the environment and economic growth are not only compatible but interdependent.

The annual G-7 summits have played a major role in addressing environmental concerns. At the 1988 Toronto Summit, environmental discussions led to an endorsement of sustainable development. Growing awareness of environmental concerns after the 1988 Toronto Summit helped shape the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, and made linking economic development to environmental protection an international priority.

The 1989 Paris Summit communiqué called for action in such areas as climate change, the integration of economic and environmental policies, sustainable forestry, and sound management of the world's oceans. It also noted that developing countries would need financing and technology transfers to deal with past damage and that these countries, too, should take environmentally responsible action.

Leaders at the 1990 Houston Summit urged that negotiations on climate change and forestry be completed, and that a strategy on reducing land-based sources of marine pollution be developed. They

underlined the need to conserve and protect living marine resources, respect conservation measures, and strengthen regional fisheries organizations. They also noted the importance of preserving biodiversity — the wealth and variety of genetic material, species, and ecosystems.

The Houston Summit endorsed the ongoing work of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on environment-economy linkages, market-oriented approaches, and environmental indicators. When OECD environment ministers met in January 1991, they developed an environmental strategy for the 1990s which included four Canadian initiatives: reviews of country environmental policy; good environmental practices for governments; examination of the relationship between trade and the environment; and the continuation of OECD work on environmental indicators.

Further support for environmental co-operation came out of the 1991 London Summit. There, emphasis was placed on the role of market economies and democratic systems in mobilizing adequate resources and ensuring accountability. Protection of living marine resources, a priority for Canada, received particular attention.

The 1992 UNCED in Rio de Janeiro was the largest gathering of world leaders in history. With more than 120 countries in attendance, UNCED's aim was to develop an international sustainable development agenda for the 21st century. The meeting also aimed to foster a global understanding of the connection between the environment and development.

The conference made progress on a broad spectrum of environmental issues ranging from climate change and forest management to the protection of biodiversity and marine resources. It also saw the adoption of the Rio Declaration, the Statement of Principles on Forests, and Agenda 21, a blueprint for sustainable development into the 21st century. In addition, framework conventions on biological diversity and on climate change were signed by more than 150 governments.

The 1992 Munich Summit pressed for action to follow up and implement the achievements of UNCED. To this end, it urged other countries to join in setting up the UN Sustainable Development Commission.

The communiqué of the 1993 Tokyo Summit restated the commitment of the G-7 countries to