

PART I

GENERAL TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Canada—A Land and Its People

In the two and a half years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held, many more Canadians and institutions within our society have taken up the challenge of sustainable development. Sustainability initiatives are under way across the country, ranging from community planning to national strategies for natural resources. They are a focus for scientific research as well as individual action.

In this section we describe Canada—its geography, society, and economy. All help to shape our emerging approach to sustainable development. All are part of an important shift from a focus on specific aspects of sustainable development to a much more comprehensive perspective.

Canada covers 7 percent of the world's land mass and has the world's longest coastline. Canada's population of just over 29 million is concentrated within less than 100 kilometres of the Canada–United States border. Within that area, population densities are high. As a result, Canada's major cities are faced with many of the same problems as other large cities in developed countries around the world.

Our substantial natural resources are an important feature of our environment and economy: they include about 9 percent of the planet's supply of freshwater, 10 percent of its forests, and significant reserves of oil, gas, coal, and minerals.

Canada is a federal state with ten provinces and two territories. Its constitutional and political system gives all orders of government some degree of authority for environmental, economic, and social issues related to sustainable development. Governments have created mechanisms to co-ordinate their sustainable development policy making and activities. They also act independently within their spheres of jurisdiction. For example, the provinces own most of the resources within their boundaries—including lands, minerals, forests, water, and the beds of navigable waters—giving them significant ability to control the use of these resources.

The Canadian Federation of Labour believes that every person has a right to live and work in healthy environments and for good wages. According to the Federation, we must learn to view the environment not in terms of its component parts but of how they function as an integrated whole, or ecosystem. As we are a society committed to the path of sustainable development, our social structure must also be viewed in this more integrated way. Therefore labour must be viewed as an essential stakeholder and partner in any strategy for sustainable development.