

*Resource base  
still the key for  
poorer states*

Mr. Strong concedes there is still a "climate of suspicion" in some of the less-developed states, but this is being overshadowed by other factors.

"More and more, the less-developed nations are seeing that action on environmental issues is in their own interest," he says. "The best answer I can give is that they are becoming deeply involved in the regional meetings leading up to the Stockholm Conference. These meetings have already involved more than 70 developing nations."

Mr. Strong believes these states have begun to recognize that the environment and economic growth are linked.

"Lack of proper environmental measures can actually impair their economic growth . . . .

"These poorer countries are asking the question, 'how do we manage our natural resource base?' They must make the best of the resources they have. The resource base in these countries is very often their natural capital."

In his travels from his base in Geneva, Mr. Strong finds that the poorer countries are becoming urgently concerned about polluted water supplies, deterioration of agricultural land, depletion of wildlife and fisheries and the problem of cities growing at unprecedented rates.

"Take irrigation projects, for example — what happens? Without environmental controls, the land could be salinated. Or, in the case of fisheries, they could disappear through the indiscriminate use and dumping of certain chemicals . . . ."

Mr. Strong notes that the principal resource in many of the developing nations is still agriculture: "Their soil resources are precious, but soil desecration in these countries is proceeding at an alarming rate. This problem has to be explored and tackled to stop the trend and hence aid the economy of the less-developed states."

As for the cities in these nations, they face the prospect of water contamination and health hazards which could make some of them unfit for human habitation within the next decade.

The man at the helm of the planning mechanism for the Stockholm Conference suggests that the real problem in tackling the environmental crisis may lie in the industrialized nations rather than the less-developed ones, despite the fact that the issue of the environment has acquired a certain magic in the industrialized West.

After the Second World War, Mr. Strong recalls, the industrialized states went through a phase of "rampant internationalism", but in recent years this has

been replaced by a trend to inward-looking policies — disillusion with postwar international initiatives. Many of these states turned to concentration on domestic issues, applying or attempting to apply domestic solutions.

"Initially they took the same approach to environmental problems. They have been dealing with them as local problems.... Now they are beginning to understand that the problems go much deeper — that there is a very real linkage between local and global problems".

What kind of international action organization does Mr. Strong envisage as a result of the Stockholm deliberations? One thing to avoid, Mr. Strong says, is the establishment of another UN Specialized Agency. Environmental problems involve a complex set of issues and cannot be confined to one sector.

What is needed, he feels, is a compact, high-level "policy and control" unit at the centre of the UN system "able to inject itself into the whole set of international relationships". This small unit would have a secretariat and someone with the rank of commissioner or under-secretary-general in charge. The unit would control a special fund and be geared to dealing with all of the UN agencies concerned — among them, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN's regional economic commissions. The environmental unit would also deal with national governments which would have to implement international conventions and commitments.

Mr. Strong doesn't want to discourage national attempts to deal with pollution problems such as Canada's unilateral venture into Arctic anti-pollution legislation. "This is all right for the short term and should act as a spur to other countries to work at the international level on such questions". But, if the Canadian move is simply imitated by others acting unilaterally, that could lead to "international anarchy", he suggests.

With an enthusiasm that matches the pace of his world travels, Mr. Strong sees the focus on the environmental crisis as a fresh way of giving East and West a reason to co-operate. He notes that the Soviet Union has been fully involved in planning for the Stockholm Conference and he expects China to follow suit.

"The environment is the most promising route by which we can rediscover the need for a global perspective and new forms of co-operation."

— Murray Goldblatt