

# GLOBAL AGENDA

CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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## Canada and the United Nations: Global Partnerships for the Environment

Will the challenge of environmental issues be a catalyst that results in a stronger, more effective United Nations? As a founding member, Canada has been an enthusiastic supporter of the mandate and work of the UN, because it believes that a framework of international law and institutions is fundamental to resolving the global issues that face all states. That framework has created a climate of co-operation that has worked across a range of discrete issues, such as peace, equality, justice and development.

### International Co-operation and Interdependence

Environmental issues and genuine sustainable development represent one of the most important tests for the UN and the world community. These issues cut across traditional lines, involve conflicting interests, and have many sources and impacts. Indeed, the interdependence of environmental, economic, political, social and security issues requires that international institutions take a cross-sectoral approach in managing and responding to this post-Cold War agenda. In the case of the UN, it is now imperative that specialized agencies, such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), to name only a few, work with one another and

with UN headquarters to ensure that actions in support of sustainable development are co-ordinated and consistent.

*"They (world leaders) must begin to reshape our international institutions for an age of total interdependence."*

Jim MacNeill

The UN has taken steps to reform its approach to environmental issues by formalizing co-operation and shared commitments among its agencies. The agencies are working with the new UN Commission on Sustainable Development, as it monitors and promotes the implementation of Agenda 21 and other commitments agreed to at last year's United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, have also begun to adapt their policies and activities to reflect the demands of sustainable development.

Still, do these efforts go far enough? The international implications of unchecked environmental degradation in the form of disputes over resources, population migrations and trans-boundary movement of wastes should not be underestimated. While the Earth Summit produced some

accomplishments, the world community is still some distance from consistent and co-ordinated action on environmental concerns.

### The United Nations - A Catalyst for Change?

Canada would welcome UN reform to respond effectively to the demand for sustainable development. What may be needed is a UN that becomes a catalyst for change, which recognizes the need for UN agencies and other international institutions to work interdependently. This would facilitate the implementation of the sustainable development agenda launched at UNCED and intended to serve as a blueprint for North-South economic co-operation and sound environmental stewardship. In those instances where integrating environmental and economic interests proves difficult, conventions and other legal instruments will increasingly become tools to further co-operation and, ultimately, settle disputes.

The ability of the UN to adapt its diverse operations and work to deal with global environmental issues will be a test of its effectiveness and relevance in the post-Cold War era. Canada supports such a course, believing firmly that the UN remains the most credible and inclusive international organization capable of fostering change in support of genuine, global sustainable development. 🍁

