

Environment

Environmental problems such as climate change, ozone depletion, acid rain, marine pollution and deforestation have been prominent issues at recent summit meetings. These problems constitute serious threats to human health, the global economy and our natural heritage. They are of great concern to all Canadians.

In March of this year, the Canadian government released *A Framework for Discussion on the Environment*, which outlines the environmental problems confronting Canadians and explores the options available to address them. Following a series of public consultations, the government will complete and release the *Green Plan*, its comprehensive action plan for the implementation of sustainable development in Canada.

The nature of public and government concern over environmental problems has changed and intensified markedly over the past two decades. Twenty years ago, environmental problems were perceived as primarily local in nature, e.g. urban air pollution and water contamination. With the emergence of acid rain as an international issue, they have come to be seen as transboundary and regional in scope. It is now apparent, given issues such as ozone depletion and climate change, that the environment is a global issue requiring global solutions. This has led to continuing efforts at more effective international co-operation, in which Canada has played an active role.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment marked the emergence of the environment on the international scene, and resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). That same year, Canada and the U.S. built on their long history of transboundary environmental co-operation by signing the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The 1970s also saw the conclusion of a number of international agreements dealing with environmental problems. These included agreements on marine pollution and the protection of wildlife and natural heritage.

Three regional agreements on transboundary air pollution have been concluded by the countries of the Economic Commission for Europe (of which Canada is a member): a framework convention on air quality (1979); and, under that convention, two protocols to reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide (1985) and nitrogen oxides (1988). Work is now under way on the third protocol in this series to deal with volatile organic compounds, a key ingredient of smog.

Furthermore, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer was negotiated in 1985; and, associated with it, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in

1987. Canada has also signed the 1989 Basel Convention, through which the international community has agreed to control the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes.

The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in April 1987 marked a turning point in environmental discussions. It placed the concept of sustainable development on the international agenda and emphasized that the environment and economic growth are not only compatible but interdependent. Linkages between the environment and population, energy, agriculture, urbanization and debt were also highlighted.

While the summits of the 1980s dealt with the environment, their approach focussed on the identification of problems and the need for additional scientific research. At the 1988 Toronto Summit, a substantive discussion on the environment took place, resulting in an endorsement of the concept of sustainable development. This summit signalled the emergence of the environment as a key international political issue.

In the months following Toronto, a number of crucial international meetings took place at the head of state or government level. Prime Minister Mulroney participated in The Hague Environmental Summit of March 1989, which focussed on the climate change issue. This summit resulted in a declaration that called for the development, within the UN, of a new institutional authority — either by strengthening existing institutions or by creating a new institution — to deal with climate change and for the provision of assistance to developing countries. The leaders of la Francophonie and the Commonwealth also issued declarations on the environment in 1989 which promoted further action on environmental and sustainable development issues.

At the 1989 Paris Summit, leaders focussed considerable attention on the environment as an international priority. The communiqué set out a comprehensive set of issues. It called for action in areas such as climate change; the environment-economy interface (including environmental indicators, at the suggestion of Canada); sustainable forestry; and the marine environment. It also noted that to help developing countries deal with past damage and to encourage them to take environmentally desirable action, aid financing and transfers of technology would be required.

Separately, the accumulating scientific evidence regarding ozone depletion demonstrated that the control measures in the Montreal Protocol must be strengthened to ensure protection of the ozone layer. This issue, as well as the question of a funding mechanism to assist developing countries