

## Sustainable Development and the Global Community

Once *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission), appeared on the world stage in 1987, the concept of sustainable development resonated throughout the international community. Among Indigenous communities in Canada, it was heralded as a vindication of sorts — a recognition that living in harmony with the natural environment must become the lifestyle of the future, not just for now.

In June 1992, world leaders from 179 countries and hundreds of nongovernmental and Indigenous organizations attended the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to discuss the critical relationship between the environmental health and the economic development of the planet. *The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, accompanied by *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development*, a nonlegally binding commitment to take action, was signed by these leaders. Most of the leaders signed both of the legally binding global conventions on biological diversity and climate change and endorsed a set of forestry principles.

*"For Inuit, sustainable development is not simply a nice buzzword. It's a concept that holds the key to survival for Inuit culture into the next century and beyond. The concept of taking only what you need of a resource and using all of what you take is one that is lost on industrialized societies. However, it is the guiding principle that allowed Inuit to survive individually and grow as a culture in the harshest environment on the planet."*

*—Inuit Circumpolar Conference,  
Agenda 21 from an Inuit Perspective*

## Canadian Indigenous Peoples and the Rio Summit

The Government of Canada supported the early involvement of Indigenous peoples in preparations for the Rio Summit in a number of ways. In 1991, national organizations representing Canadian Indigenous peoples were members of the National Report Steering Committee, which issued *Canada's National Report: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Brazil, June 1992*. With funding support from the Government of Canada, the Indigenous communities were able to contribute to the substance of negotiations and debates leading to the conference documents and parallel events at Rio.

## The Rio Declaration

The Rio Declaration contains 27 principles defining the rights and responsibilities of nations as they pursue human development and well-being and makes specific mention of Indigenous people and their communities. It states that the way to ensure long-term economic progress, beneficial to humanity, is to link it with environmental