



news release

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UNITED NATIONS ESTABLISHES COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall and Environment Minister Jean Charest today welcomed the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution establishing the Commission on Sustainable Development. Canada has played an active role throughout the discussions leading up to the establishment of the Commission.

"The global character of environment problems means that no nation can act in isolation. We all face common sets of problems that need new co-operative efforts if we are to deal with them," said Mrs. McDougall. "This Commission is a significant step forward in getting the world community to organize itself to better deal with the challenges of sustainable development."

"Canada looks forward to open and constructive exchanges with other members of the Commission on their action plans for Agenda 21," said Mr. Charest. "Canada is also committed to sharing its Green Plan experience with other countries as they prepare their sustainable development plans."

The Commission has been given a comprehensive and forward-looking mandate regarding the implementation of Agenda 21, the principal document agreed to by world leaders at the June 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, its mandate will cover the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Guiding Principles on Forests, and new co-operative arrangements related to sustainable development. Canada will look to the Commission to build international co-operation on forests and fisheries and to provide impetus to the development of international environmental law.

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For further information, media representatives may contact:

Media Relations Office
External Affairs and International Trade Canada
(613) 995-1874

BACKGROUNDER

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations has established a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development to guide implementation of Agenda 21, a comprehensive strategy for global action on sustainable development, and other agreements negotiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced on December 4, 1992, that the Secretariat of the Commission will be located in New York in the new Department of Policy Co-ordination and Sustainable Development. The Department will be headed by Nitin Desai (India), who served as Deputy to Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of UNCED.

How the Commission Will Work

The Commission will be made up of high-level representatives of 53 states elected from the UN member states. Membership will rotate among governments and will be drawn equitably from various geographic regions. Canada will apply for membership to the Commission during the February 1993 organizational session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), of which the Commission will be a subsidiary body.

The Commission will:

- monitor implementation of Agenda 21, recognizing that it is a dynamic document that could evolve over time;
- promote incorporation of the principles of the Rio Declaration and the Guiding Principles on Forests in the implementation of Agenda 21;
- consider implementation of Agenda 21 by governments, on the basis of information provided by them, including problems relating to financial resources and the transfer of environmentally sound technology;
- review commitments made by donor countries in Agenda 21, including the provision of new and additional financial resources and the transfer of technology on favourable terms;
- review and analyze relevant input from competent non-governmental organizations, and enhance the dialogue with non-governmental and independent sector groups; and
- work with other UN agencies to integrate principles of sustainability throughout the UN system.

Timetable of Meetings

The Commission will be formally established and its members elected at the organizational session of ECOSOC, February 2 to 5, 1993. An organizational session of the new Commission will be held in New York,

possibly in February 1993, to elect officers and decide on the agenda of its first substantive session planned for New York during the May/June 1993 period. The location of future meetings is still to be decided.

It is expected that rules of procedure for non-governmental organizations (NGOs)' participation will be considered at the organizational session of ECOSOC, in time to permit NGO involvement in the Commission's sessions. Canada is very supportive of NGO involvement in the work of the Commission and has played a significant role during negotiations to ensure their active participation.

Program of Work

The Secretary-General will submit proposals for the Commission's program of work to its organizational session. At the same time, the UN General Assembly recommended that the Commission adopt a "multi-year thematic program," setting particular issues in Agenda 21 as priorities each year.

The Assembly recommended that, to ensure an integrated approach to environment and development and to link sectoral and cross-sectoral issues, the Commission's work could be "clustered" as follows: financial resources and mechanisms; the transfer of environmentally sound technology; capacity-building; and implementation (at international, regional and national levels) of Agenda 21 and relevant environmental conventions.

A high-level meeting, to include government ministers, would also be held as part of the Commission's annual session to provide an integrated overview of implementation of Agenda 21 and to consider emerging policy issues. This meeting is intended to give political impetus to the decisions taken at the Earth Summit and to the fulfilment of commitments made there.

Canada's Priorities for the Commission

Canada's key substantive priorities for the Commission include:

- building international co-operation on forest management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests;
- providing impetus for the development of new international environmental law;
- ensuring transparency in the Commission's work by involving Indigenous groups, business, scientists and all major groups; and
- supporting the work of the UN Conference on High Seas Fishing.