

GLOBAL AGENDA

CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SUMMER 1993

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. 🍁



A Foundation for Success

The First Meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

By Arthur H. Campeau, Q.C.

Canada's Ambassador for Environment and Sustainable Development
Vice-Chair of the CSD

The first substantive session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) held in New York in June produced tangible results and a climate for future co-operation. Above all, it established that the CSD enjoys the support of political leaders and a broad range of groups worldwide.

The meeting in New York had two major outcomes. It confirmed the structure and multi-year thematic work plan of the CSD outlined in the last issue of **GLOBAL AGENDA**. It also brought together more than 40 environment ministers who met along with other participants for two days at the end of the session to discuss how they could provide political support to the Commission's goals through concrete actions by their own governments and by the international community. For the CSD, this political dynamic provides a good balance between broad policy perspectives and specific technical issues and ensures that the meetings are more likely to result in firm action being taken.

The result therefore, is an ambitious agenda based on concrete, focussed activities. For example, two intersessional working groups will meet to consider the challenging financial and technology transfer issues. Each will bring together facts, develop analyses and focus on the practical considerations. In

addition to the two working groups, many countries have offered to host meetings on topics relevant to the CSD's short-term work plan, such as fresh water, health, human settlements and waste. This process should advance these issues substantially for next year's meeting.

"The challenge before the Commission is to demonstrate to the world that the political will which led to the agreements of Rio will continue to guide the implementation of these agreements."

Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development

The importance of reporting by national governments was also emphasized. Since the global sustainable development agenda depends as much on regional, national and local initiatives as it does on international ones, this will ensure a good balance of commitment in implementation efforts.


Another important outcome of the meeting was the high degree of North-South co-operation that emerged in the wake of Rio. This is a key element to the success of the global sustainable development agenda.

Canada played an active role in helping to achieve the success of this meeting. We stressed the value of round

tables as a means of forging consensus on major issues. For example, we have proposed a round table on sustainable cities in conjunction with Globe '94 to be held in Vancouver in March 1994. We also offered the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg as an informal forum in which key CSD members can build consensus on trade and sustainable development issues.

Another contribution was our idea of living laboratories, models for achieving sustainable development. For example, our network of model forests could be used to pool knowledge on this vital part of the global environment.

As in Rio, one valuable aspect of the work of the CSD was the productive and responsible involvement of non-governmental organizations. They took an active and persuasive approach to issues, underlining the value of their participation. Their involvement has already had an impact on CSD actions and its base of support.

The meeting in New York gave the CSD the tools to fulfil its mandate and demonstrated that the will is there to use those tools effectively. The task is now to take the success to date and translate it into concrete results. 

The Challenges of Change

A Conversation with Elizabeth Dowdeswell Executive Director, United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

Global Agenda: *You have been executive director for seven months now, arriving at a time of considerable transition following UNCED. What is UNEP's key role in this post-UNCED period?*

Elizabeth Dowdeswell: This post-UNCED period is a very exciting time. A number of important things happened at UNCED that are going to change not only what we do but how we do it. That, in turn, will be influenced by the entire reform of the UN system. This provides all kinds of scope and opportunity for reevaluating our role and looking ahead over the next decade. We have checked our activities against Agenda 21 and UNCED. It became clear to us that there are emerging areas that require a much strengthened initiative and other areas that require a restructuring or refocussing. The recent Governing Council took very seriously the job of looking at priorities, with three surfacing.

The first was capacity building. I would stress that this does not just mean training and education. It involves a much more systemic look at how to support the development of sound environmental and sustainable developmental practices, in developing countries in particular. That means looking at everything from environmental law and institutions, to governance, to policy making, to the mobilization of financial resources, training, education, information networks and so forth. For UNEP, that means much of what we do should be judged by how it contributes to capacity building. Some of what we've done in the past will remain, but we will reorient some programs so that they become management tools.

Secondly, the priority will be the mobilization of governments and others to really solve environmental problems. UNEP has always had a catalytic role. One of our strengths is in bringing governments to the table, be it around formal negotiations for an international treaty or for the design of a regional program. One of the requests we're getting from places where there are

"I focus on the development of management tools because... countries are simply crying out for assistance in very practical ways to help them understand what it means to implement sustainable development. Everybody has the rhetoric down pat, but people are genuinely looking for how on Earth you do it."

cross-border conflicts over, for example, water, is to come in and help countries design a long-term plan for co-operation. We will always have an interest in the management of natural resources, so that we can be a critical element in bringing governments together to solve particular problems. I hope we can push forward the edges of environmental law into such areas as innovative conflict resolution.

The third priority is what I call sensing the environment. The world expects that it can come to UNEP at any point in time and find out what the state of the environment is. We need to continue to do that, whether we do it ourselves or ensure that we have

the networks to do it. Our Earthwatch program came under close scrutiny, primarily because some countries viewed it as data collection for the sake of collecting data. We need to ask ourselves whether we are looking at Earthwatch as a management tool.

GA: *The co-ordination of effort between U.N.-related bodies has always been a challenge. You have called for a "team approach" to implementing sustainable development. How will UNEP contribute?*

ED: I think that is already in evidence. A local example is the synergy between Habitat and UNEP. One of the first clusters of Agenda 21 issues being examined by the CSD is that of human settlements, health and waste management. What is happening here in Nairobi is that people in both Habitat and UNEP are discovering all kinds of duplication and, more importantly, where there is opportunity for co-operation. That is just one example of how the concept of sustainable development means that no one agency can possibly implement it. It's a bringing together of disciplines that have not traditionally worked together, whether it be the social and natural sciences or the environment and the economy. That means you have to search out new partnerships. Most of what we are doing is now in partnership. Very little is done on our own, whether it's bringing the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] into biodiversity, working with UNCTAD [UN Conference on Trade and Development] and GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] on trade-related matters, or with UNIFEM [United Nations

Development Fund for Women] on the critical issue of women and development. We have partnerships with almost every UN agency. What I'm trying to do is ensure that we form those partnerships at the beginning when the strategic thinking is being done, rather than after something has already been designed.

GA: *The Commission on Sustainable Development recently held its inaugural session. What do you see as the chief results?*

ED: Let me say first that I am a strong supporter of the concept of the CSD because I think that a high-level political forum to provide incentive to governments and organizations to maintain a focus and a priority on the follow-up to Agenda 21 is particularly important. I don't see the CSD as competing with UNEP. One is operational and the other is not. The CSD, through its very focussed political discussions, should be in a position to give impetus to all parts of the system and, in fact, member governments.

I was delighted by a number of things that happened at CSD. First, there was enough political commitment shown to indicate that governments wanted CSD to work. Second, governments displayed a willingness to try out different ways of working. For example, they readily accepted the invitations of several countries to work in collaboration with them and other parts of the UN system to tackle key issues. That has not been the traditional way of working.

GA: *You seem to have a solid faith in the UN's ability to facilitate global environmental, economic and social changes. On what do you base this?*

ED: I'm an eternal optimist for one thing, but, more importantly, I

have always believed that multilateralism is one of the best tools that we have to solve our global problems. The UN provides one of our very best hopes. It is not without difficulty, as we see so much of the resources of the UN being focussed on peacemaking and peacekeeping. The whole development side of the agenda, the social and economic side, requires a great deal of attention.

"I do believe that we have been able to achieve a lot through this multilateral forum, and I don't see anything better on the horizon. I see a real opportunity for organizations like UNEP and Habitat to become what I call instruments of peace."

That is something I believe in passionately. The work UNEP does in precautionary thinking and sensing issues before they become points of conflict is important. I think the work that Habitat does in resettlement can pave the way to a much better and well articulated continuum of activity from disaster relief to rehabilitation and, ultimately, development.

GA: *It is said that solutions to global environmental problems begin locally. Why then are we assigning a greater role to international institutions?*

ED: We are discovering with the class of problems we have uncovered that they are global problems. You can make an impact locally, and you must make an impact locally, but ultimately you need the whole world to find a sound solution. We are becoming less and less isolationist as countries. The issues of international trade, for

example, become critical to the resolution of some of our domestic sustainability issues. Just look at Canada's difficulties over fishing. Very often what you need to shake the system domestically is a good deal of international peer pressure. I never underestimate the power of peer pressure in really mobilizing solutions.

GA: *Where can Canada best contribute to the sustainable development efforts of UNEP and other UN agencies?*

ED: Canada has a very proud record with respect to its role within UN institutions, and it simply must continue. It must because it has achieved a credibility that allows it to mobilize action, among large and small governments, among developed and developing countries, that very few other countries can do. Because of its track record, its participatory approach and inclusiveness, it is credible to many countries. That places a significant obligation on its shoulders to play its part to mobilize solutions. Canada continues to show that other approaches can work. Sometimes it's that pilot project, that case study, that living example, that says so much more than reams of paper.

"The work that Canada has done with non-governmental groups, the fact that Canada had in its UNCED delegation representation from provincial governments, business groups, women, youth and natives, the fact that it includes all of those resources in its work speaks volumes internationally."



Global Partnerships

Canada's Role in the Global Environmental Monitoring System's (GEMS) Water Quality Program



Global deterioration of water quality and quantity in many countries is projected to be the key sustainable development issue in the next century, for more than one third of the developing world. The business of water management has become a major export industry for Europe, Japan, and the United States. Internationally, Canada is considered to be very strong in the field of effective water resources management.

Due to Canada's international reputation in the water sector, Canada has played a central role in the water quality component of the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) since the inception of its Water Quality Program in 1977. GEMS is a United Nations program co-ordinated by UNEP and the central part of the UN's Earthwatch program. GEMS/Water is the single largest part of GEMS and the first program of its kind to address global freshwater quality issues using a worldwide network of surface and ground-water quality monitoring stations.

Through the National Water Research Institute (NWRI) of Environment Canada, Canada agreed to host the Global Data Centre at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters (CCIW). Because of its international reputation in freshwater science, CCIW was designated a "World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Surface and Ground Water Quality". In April 1993, NWRI/CCIW was designated a "UNEP GEMS collaborating Centre for Freshwater Quality Monitoring and Assessment". This UNEP

designation, the first time a non-UN facility had received this status, was in recognition of Canada's role as a co-equal partner with UNEP and WHO in managing and implementing major components of the GEMS/Water Program.

Until 1989, GEMS/Water focussed primarily on establishing a global network and major databases using the Global Data Centre in Canada. Following an international program review in 1990, and to respond to growing concerns over freshwater quality in developing countries, the program entered its second phase with two major objectives:

- * *To strengthen national water quality and assessment institutions so that national data programs are more effective and efficient in managing water resources and for developing public policy for environmental and resource management.*
- * *To strengthen the global databases for the purposes of regional and global assessments of water quality.*

Through GEMS/Water, Canada has strong institutional and/or data links to other regional and global water programs, such as the WHO's Operational Hydrology Programme, UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme, the ECE environmental statistics program, the Global Runoff Data Centre in Germany, and the lake management program of Japan's International Environmental Technology Centre, to name a few. Through the Global Data Centre,

Canada provides data compilation and analysis to international organizations such as the World Bank, World Resources Institute, and the GEMS Monitoring and Assessment Research Centre in London, U.K.

Canada's role in GEMS/Water has tangible domestic and international economic and strategic benefits for Canadians. Through the program numerous business opportunities have been identified for the private sector. GEMS/water often provides the background and local knowledge that contributes to a strategic framework for Canadian bilateral initiatives. For example, the GEMS program assisted in identifying partners to co-develop a Spanish language version of RAISON, a PC-based environmental information system. RAISON is now installed as a primary tool for managing water quality monitoring and regulatory data in Mexico.

GEMS/Water is implemented by the World Health Organization with the co-operation of UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization. Some 57 countries currently participate, with many more (especially Eastern European countries) about to come on stream. GEMS/Water played the focal role in developing the freshwater chapter of Agenda 21 and continues to provide leadership in the water sector within the UN system in follow-up to the Rio Conference.

The GEMS/Water Program is one example of the global partnerships supported by Canada and the United Nations. 🍁

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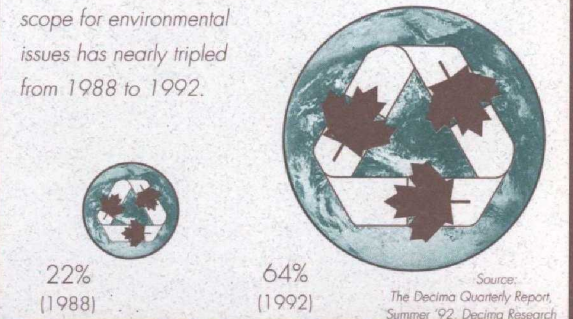
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Over the past several years, the protection of the global environment has increased in importance for Canadians, as it has for citizens of virtually all countries. Canadians feel strongly about the international role that their country plays in helping to care for a fragile world environment, and they expect Canada to do its fair share.

GLOBAL AGENDA is a quarterly bulletin that will discuss how Canadian foreign policy can most effectively deal with global environmental challenges. Each publication will focus on a priority issue for Canada in environmental foreign policy and will profile "policy in action" abroad. Canada's Ambassador for Environment and Sustainable Development will discuss issues on the global environment agenda and report on the work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Periodically, guest articles and book reviews will be included.

The percentage of Canadians citing the "Whole World" as the scope for environmental issues has nearly tripled from 1988 to 1992.



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