The international effort to ban landmines gained momentum, with Bangladesh and Colombia ratifying the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. And the advent of the International Criminal Court drew a step nearer as the Rome Statute was ratified by four countries and signed by twelve. The Statute now has a total of 110 signatures and 19 ratifications. It will enter into force following the sixtieth ratification.

Among the many other treaties that received support, were several on the protection of the environment, including the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which seeks to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases.

In addition, actions were taken on a number of conventions and treaties concerned with the suppression of terrorism, nuclear testing, landmines, chemical weapons and other weapons that have excessive or indiscriminate effects.

The Republic of Korea signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Altogether there were more than 300 different actions on treaties, conventions and additional protocols that ranged from the defence of human rights through measures to circumscribe the use and proliferation of deadly weapons to the protection of the environment.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in his closing statement that by their actions, the heads of State had “reaffirmed the vital importance of international law, which is the common language of our international community.” In their Millennium statement, the Member States resolved to “strengthen the rule of law in international as in national affairs.”

One of the first pillars of international humanitarian law, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, was further strengthened during the three days, as several countries added their names. The Covenant, which forms part of the “International Bill of Human Rights,” defends basic human rights such as freedom from torture, enslavement and arbitrary detention, and freedom of movement, expression and association.

Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, underlined that “ratification of treaties will be the first indicator of State willingness to embrace a rights-based order in the new millennium.”

Final Sessions

Heads of State, speaking on the last day of the Summit, continued to focus much of their attention on ways of turning globalisation into a positive force for solving such problems as poverty, marginalisation and inequality.

In a statement released before the final session, the co-chairs of the Summit praised the “frank and constructive” spirit demonstrated by the world leaders attending the forum and called on them to translate agreed commitments into action.

“Both in their speeches in the plenaries of the Summit and in their interactive round tables, the heads of State and Government again and again stressed the relevance and the importance of the United Nations in a global society,” said President Tarja Halonen of Finland and President Sam Nujoma of Namibia.

With regard to the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General in his report, a first, positive development could be announced regarding the initiatives on a high-tech volunteer corps, which is already in operation. According to the UN Volunteers (UNV), 23 information professionals have taken up their assignments in developing countries as part of the corps.

Speaking after the Summit, the UN Environment Programme’s Executive Director, Klaus Toepfer, welcomed the Declaration’s comprehensive chapter on the environment and highlighted the call by Heads of State to intensify cooperation on reducing the negative consequences of natural and manmade disasters. He also expressed the hope that the Declaration will give added momentum to the adoption of a new ethic of global environmental stewardship and responsibility.

This was the hope voiced by many delegates at the end of the session, who were interested to see how their deliberations would be reflected and implemented in the day-to-day business of the General Assembly. (MJ)

**ECOSOC**

**Forum for Indigenous Issues**

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted, on 31 July 2000, a resolution to establish a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues – seen as an unprecedented event in the international community. This was the latest step in a long process initiated in 1993, when the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights first proposed such a forum.

Indigenous people have struggled for a long time to make their concerns heard by governments, the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. However, their circumstances and needs went largely unnoticed by the international community until the publication of the landmark study undertaken by the UN Subcommission on the Protection of Minorities and Prevention of Discrimination in the 1970s. The Study, prepared by the Special Rapporteur, José Martinez Cobo of Ecuador, led directly to the establishment of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which met for the first time on 9 August 1982.

During its 18 years of existence, the Working Group
has completed several studies – inter alia, on the relationship of indigenous peoples to land, on treaties and agreements, and on the protection of the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples. The Working Group has consistently reported that indigenous peoples around the world continue to be among the most marginalised and impoverished, and that their ways of life, cultural heritage and languages continue to be threatened. At the same time, the various world conferences of recent years have repeatedly validated the contribution of indigenous societies, particularly regarding sustainable development and the protection of the Earth’s biodiversity.

When the United Nations General Assembly adopted the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People (1995–2004), it identified the establishment of the Forum as one of the main objectives of the Decade. The General Assembly also called for the International Day of the World’s Indigenous People to be observed annually on 9 August, as part of the Decade.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, Coordinator of the International Decade, welcomed the decision as a “historic step forward.” “The Permanent Forum,” she said, “promises to give indigenous peoples a unique voice within the United Nations system, commensurate with the unique problems which many indigenous people still face, but also with the unique contribution they make to the human rights dialogue, at the local, national and international levels.”

Indigenous representatives, not simply representatives of Member States will, for the first time, participate in a high-level forum in the United Nations system. The Forum will be a subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council and will consist of 16 representatives. Eight members are to be nominated by governments and elected by the Council, and eight are to be appointed by the President of the Council following broad consultations with indigenous organisations and groups. The selection process is to take into account principles of representation and the diversity and geographical distribution of indigenous peoples. Organisations of indigenous people may participate in the Forum as observers, as may States, United Nations bodies and organs, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. (MJ)