School of Nuclear Law
The first session of the International School of Nuclear Law, recently established within the University of Montpellier in cooperation with the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) opened on 27 August. The School also benefits from the support of the International Nuclear Law Association, the European Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Over 50 students from 34 countries will attend lectures and practical seminars taught by world-renowned specialists in the field of nuclear law over a two-week period. The primary objective is to provide high-quality education on the various aspects of this discipline both to law students pursuing their studies at doctoral or masters level and to young legal professionals who are already active in the nuclear sector.

The programme for the Summer 2001 session included classes on the following subjects: protection against ionising radiation; safety of nuclear installations; radioactive waste management; nuclear accidents and radiological emergencies; transport of nuclear materials and fuel; physical protection; non-proliferation; regulation of trade and third-party liability and the compensation of nuclear damage.

UNDP: New Energy and Environment Trust Funds
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has recently introduced two major trust funds to assist countries in pursuing environmentally sound policies and in promoting energy as a tool for development. With US$60 million allocated over three years, the new funds will seek to help donors address local environmental needs that are currently not eligible for financing from other funds. The Thematic Trust Fund for Environment aims to boost UNDP’s efforts in helping countries establish policies and institutions that would protect the environment and reduce poverty. The Fund will ensure that national, regional and global environmental efforts are aligned, thereby enabling UNDP to focus its support on integrating environmental management concerns into national development frameworks, strengthening local environmental governance and addressing global and regional environmental problems.

The Thematic Trust Fund for Energy for Sustainable Development will focus on national policy frameworks, rural energy services, clean energy technologies and new financing mechanisms to support sustainable energy use and production. See also http://www.undp.org/dpa/pressreleases/2001/september/10sept01.html.

Brazil: Timber Council
Environmental, social and economic groups have established an organisation to certify local timber. The Brazilian Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has been present in Brazil for five years, but until now it has operated through a working group of WWF, Greenpeace, Amazon rubber-tapping organisations and Brazil’s WWF in Brazil. Members of the new Council include WWF, Greenpeace, Amazon rubber-tapping organisations and Brazil’s WWF in Brazil. Over 50 companies in Brazil are currently FSC-certified to sell timber. The certification is likely to enlarge Brazil’s share of timber in the world market, while sustaining good forest management practices. Seventy companies in Brazil are currently FSC-certified to sell timber.

Aarhus Convention to Enter into Force

The pan-European Convention, negotiated by the UN Economic Commission for Europe, supports environmental transpar-ency by ensuring that governments cannot hide sensitive environmen-mental information or cover up environmental mishaps. The Convention aims to give citizens a voice in decision-making af-fecting their environment and allows them to take to court govern-ments and polluters that break the rules.

The majority of the countries that have ratified are Eastern European countries and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. See also Environmental Policy and Law, Vol. 30 (5) 2000, p. 220.

GM Guidelines
Agreement has been reached on the first global guidelines requiring countries to test the safety of genetically modified (GM) foods prior to their entry into the market.

The agreement, which relates in particular to the potential of GM foods to cause allergic reactions, was reached during the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, held in early July.

Member States also approved a series of new maximum lev-els of contaminants, including lead, cadmium and the carcinogen aflatoxin, in fruit juices, cereals and milk.

The Commission also agreed on new guidelines for organic livestock production, supporting natural breeding methods and progressive elimination of the use of antibiotics and growth hor-mones. A task force is expected to have detailed GM testing guide-lines prepared by 2003 in time for the Commission’s next major session.

The report of the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s 24th Session is at http://www.codexalimentarius.net/cac24/alinorm014/hhtoc.htm.

UNEP:
– Forest Report
The report states that efforts to save the world’s forests should initially focus on the 15 countries that contain 80 per cent of the world’s remaining closed forests. The report also shows how govern-mental protection for closed forests varies between countries, with Venezuela having 63 per cent of its forests in protected areas, while Russia has only 2 per cent of its forests protected. A key finding in the report is that 88 per cent of closed forests in the 15 countries currently have low to non-existent population densi-ties, thus offering an opportunity for conservation.

The report calls on governments to tighten national conser-vation laws, enforce wildlife smuggling and poaching laws, and draft action plans to conserve remaining closed forests.

– Atlas of Coral Reefs
According to a comprehensive new atlas of reefs launched on 11 September by the United Nations Environment Programme, the world’s coral reefs are much less extensive than previously thought, and are under constant assault from human beings.

The atlas includes maps of the 660 protected marine areas in the world that include coral reefs but, the authors say, the protection exists in many cases only on paper and is not enforced.

The atlas states that there are 284,300 sq. km of coral reefs worldwide and they cover roughly the same area as Italy. The maps show that the extent of coral in some places is between a half and a tenth of previous estimates, and reefs are still being damaged faster than the data can be collected.

UNEP says that reefs are “overfished, bombed and poisoned” by fishermen, as well as being damaged by irresponsible tour-ists, smothered by sediment, choked by algae that are nourished on sewage and fertiliser run-off, and placed under stress by the warming of the oceans.

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the UK (the last two by virtue of their overseas territories). These countries do have the resources to protect coral. The leading coral reef nation is Indonesia, where 82 per cent of the reefs are defined by the atlas as being “at risk”. In the heavily populated Philippines, that figure is 97 per cent. Mark Spalding, the main author of the atlas, calls the decline of reefs “utterly nonsensical” given that protecting coral is not merely good for fish but usually provides economic and social benefits for communities.

The atlas looks at the economics of reef management and says that well-managed tourism can be an important source of income for coral reef nations. For example, tourism around Australia’s Great Barrier Reef provides more foreign money than the country’s entire fishing industry.

UNEP has said that the preservation of coral reefs is essential not just for their beauty. Reefs often protect low-lying coastal regions, host a great diversity of marine species, including a quarter of all marine fish, and act as a “bio-indicator” of the whole ecosystem.

In a separate study, scientist Rupert Ormond recently predicted that the world’s coral reefs will die within 50 years from rising sea temperatures caused by climate change. He stated that this decline is inevitable even if humans were to stop emitting greenhouse gases that cause climate change. (The World Atlas of Coral Reefs: http://www.unep-wcmc.org/)

World Population

According to a recent study by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), world population is expected to peak at 9 billion by 2070 before dropping back down to 8.4 billion by 2100.

This finding, which shows an 85 per cent chance that world population will stop growing before 2100, contradicts UN projections, which predict population growth to 9.7 billion by 2150, stabilising at over 10 billion after 2200.

The new study also predicts a large geographic redistribution of the population, with Europe’s share dwindling and Africa’s rising from today’s 10 per cent to 34 per cent by 2100. Population age pyramids, 1985 and 2025

Source: UN

FAO:

– Dangers of Over-Cultivation

At a conference in October sponsored by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on intensive farming, the Organisation warned of the increasing dangers of soil erosion and degradation caused by intensive land cultivation using pesticides and heavy equipment. The problem of such soil degradation is particularly acute in warmer countries, due to the topsoil being generally thinner than in more northern climates.

To counteract these problems, the FAO is promoting new agricultural techniques in the farming industry. The most successful alternative method so far has been “conservation agriculture.”

This technique was pioneered in Latin America ten years ago as a response to the problems encountered in the tropical Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, where maize farmers had been using heavy machinery and pesticides for years, without any kind of crop rotation. The technique seeks to exploit the productive potential of those crop and animal genetic resources that are best adapted to the local environment. This requires farmers to drastically reduce tillage, rotate crops annually and keep a protective cover of leaves, stems and stalks from the previous crop. This has the effect of shielding the soil from the heat, which reduces moisture loss by evaporation.

The practice of conservation agriculture has now been extended to about 58 million hectares of land. The largest user of this practice is the United States, followed by Brazil, Argentina, Canada and Paraguay. The FAO hopes to extend the scheme to Africa, Central and South Asia.

– Tropical Forest Destruction

The FAO has warned in the latest issue of the “State of the World’s Forests 2001”, published on 1 October, that “During the 1990s, the loss of natural forests was 16.1 million hectares per year, of which 15.2 million occurred in the tropics.” This corresponds to annual losses of 0.4 per cent globally and 0.8 per cent in the tropics. The rate of deforestation is still highest in Africa and South America. There are an estimated 3,870 million hectares (ha) of forest worldwide covering some 30 per cent of the surface of the globe, of which almost 95 per cent are natural forests and 5 per cent are forest plantations. Over the...
past decade the estimated net annual change in forest area world-
wide (difference between forests lost and new plantations) has
been approximately 10 million hectares. Natural forests have been
disappearing at a rate of almost 18.1 million hectares per year,
with 1.2 million ha lost in the tropics. On the other hand, natural
forest expansion was estimated at 3.6 million ha annually in the
past decade, of which 2.6 million ha were in non-tropical coun-
tries and 1 million ha in the tropics. The FAO report says “Forest
expansion has been occurring for several decades in many in-
dustrialised countries, especially where agriculture is no longer
an economically viable land use.”

However, tropical forests are continuing to disappear at an
alarming rate. The countries with the highest net loss of forest
area between 1990 and 2000 were Argentina, Brazil, the Demo-
cratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mexico, Nigeria,
Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The FAO attributes the loss and degradation of forests to
conversion to other land uses – mainly agriculture – and to pests
and diseases, fire, over-exploitation of forest products for indus-
trial wood and firewood, poor harvesting practices, over-grazing,
air pollution and storms.

The report stresses that efforts to improve forest manage-
ment will only be successful if forest crime and corruption can
be reduced. It states that in some cases, and as a consequence of
trade liberalisation and globalisation, illegal logging and trade
appear to be growing.

GESAMP: Evaluation Report
An in-depth evaluation of the work of the Joint Group of Ex-
perts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protec-
tion (GESAMP) was among the topics dealt with by GESAMP
during its thirty-first session in August 2001.

GESAMP is an expert scientific advisory body established in
1968 to provide scientific advice concerning the prevention, re-
duction and control of the degradation of the marine environment.
Such advice is presented to the eight sponsoring agencies of
GESAMP: the United Nations, through the Division for Ocean
Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs; United
Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Edu-
cational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)/Inter-
governmental Oceanographic Commission; Food and Agriculture
Organisation; World Meteorological Organisation; International
Maritime Organisation; World Health Organisation; and Interna-
tional Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In addition to providing scientific advice, GESAMP’s other
main purpose is to prepare periodic reviews and assessments of
the state of the marine environment and to identify problem ar-
eas requiring special attention.

In May 2000, the UN-sponsoring agencies of GESAMP agreed
to carry out an independent and in-depth evaluation of the achieve-
ments of GESAMP, its impact, scope, membership, working meth-
ods and future role. Such an evaluation was envisioned as a pre-
liminary step prior to the formulation of proposals for a possible
new United Nations Memorandum of Understanding on GESAMP.

The evaluation was carried out by an independent evaluation
team which examined, among other things, the degree to which
GESAMP had fulfilled its goals and objectives, and whether there
was a need for GESAMP or a similar group under the United
Nations umbrella.

In its report, the evaluation team presented a number of rec-
ommendations, including a strong wish for the continuation of
GESAMP itself. These recommendations include raising the pro-
file and visibility of GESAMP through an overall promotional and
marketing plan; the establishment of closer links between the
Group and governments; and a revision of the goals and objec-
tives of the Group.

The GESAMP Evaluation Team concluded that the United
Nations, its Member States and other organisations require an
effective, efficient and independent group to provide advice on
issues relating to marine environmental protection and manage-
ment and sustainable development of marine resources and
amenities based on sound scientific principles.

IMO: Convention Signed on Anti-Fouling Sys-
tems
A Convention on the control of harmful anti-fouling systems
for ships was signed on 5 October in London at the headquarters
of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Anti-fouling ship paint which contains TBT (tributyltin) is
claimed to severely damage the marine environment. The Euro-
pean organisation of paint producers acknowledge that alterna-
tives are available on the market worldwide. Indeed, many major
shipping companies, such as Maersk, Cunard Line, Hapag-Lloyd,
Stintzis, P&O, North Sea Ferries and the Medi-
terranean Shipping Company have already
stopped using TBT paint on their vessels be-
cause of the environmental damage it causes.

The new Convention stems from resolu-
tion A.895(21) on anti-fouling systems for ships
adopted by the IMO in November 1999, which
called on the Organisation’s Marine Environ-
ment Protection Committee (MEPC) to draw up a legally binding international instrument
to combat the use of toxic anti-fouling prod-

China: New Development Strategy Needed
Despite the serious environmental toll extracted by the last
two decades of phenomenal economic growth in China, a new
report by the World Bank says the Government can build an en-
vironmentally sustainable future, but only by changing its devel-
opment strategy.

The report, entitled “China: Air, Land and Water – Environ-
mental Priorities for a New Millennium,” points to three areas of
success: broad-based and absolute reduction in industrial air and
water pollutant emissions during the second half of the 1990s;
the reversal of deforestation through massive investments in re-
forestation and afforestation; and the reversal of secondary
salinisation in irrigation areas through major control and preven-
tion programmes.

According to Yukon Huang, the Bank’s Country Director for
China, “these achievements are arguably unprecedented in any
country at China’s state of economic development.” But he added,
“the battle is not even close to being won. Environmental chal-
enges are likely to become far larger and more complex over the
next 10 years and the Government will have to reorient its ap-
proach if it wants to make further progress.”

The report, prepared by a World Bank team and assisted by
technical specialists from 10 Chinese research institutions, uni-
versities and other organisations, reviews the state of the envi-
ronment and assesses the effectiveness of the Government’s
environmental protection work over the last 10 years. It makes
recommendations on how to address the new challenges which
will face the country in the near future.

Among its proposals, the report urges moving from the cur-
rent approach of mainly fixing the harmful effects of other devel-
opment decisions to a more proactive strategy aimed at avoiding
or minimising the adverse environmental effects of development
in the first place.