

EDITORIAL

The new year started with good news for the environment and with promise of more to come. The Montreal Protocol to control substances which deplete the ozone layer came into force at the beginning of January (see page 2). Shortly afterwards the Environment Ministers of European Community Member States decided to move faster than required by the Protocol, and it is expected that the London Conference on the Ozone Layer-- with broader participation -- will do likewise. Atmospheric protection was also the goal of the legal experts who met in Ottawa in February (see page 8), where many new proposals were made.

The results of the Sofia Conference concerning a convention on the transport of hazardous waste came more quickly than expected. Since then, however, doubts have been voiced that a convention can be adopted that is strong enough to meet demands and in time for the signing ceremony scheduled for the 22 March in Basle (see report on page 5). As UNEP's Executive Director is still optimistic that a positive outcome can be achieved in the short time left, we hope to be able to print the convention in the next issue.

Other good news was that some Southeast Asian nations have moved to protect their tropical forests. In the wake of severe flooding in the country, blamed on uncontrolled deforestation, the Thai Government issued a decree in January abrogating all logging concessions. In Indonesia, the Government has said that it will tighten controls over holders of timber concessions and permit holders who violate forestry regulations are liable to have their licences revoked. Although this is a start, it is clear to all concerned that only a global forest conservation and replanting programme, which will require unprecedented international co-operation and political support, can hope to save the world's tropical forests. Such a programme would be the good news for the start of next year!

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Preparations were already under way for the next UNEP Governing Council when news was leaked that a conference of about 20 Heads of State and Government had been called in The Hague for the middle of February. Rumours were so strong that the Dutch Prime Minister had to confirm what one group called the French initiative and what another termed the French/Nordic/Dutch initiative. We know that this meeting was planned without inviting, for example, the USA, the USSR and the UK. On the other hand, the Prime Minister of India and the President of Brazil were known to have accepted. We shall be very interested to see what comes out of the meeting. While no formal agreement can be reached, we expect that in addition to a strong Declaration at least a Working Group will have been created so that next time something more positive can be reported.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet announce anything concrete for UNEP's Governing Council in May, as the discussion papers are not yet out. Quite a high-level discussion has already been held in Nairobi with the participation of some Ministers, concerning UNEP's general programme and tasks. It will, therefore, be interesting to see what proposals the Executive Director will make on the basis of the advice given by the meeting. □

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