

EDITORIAL

A Declaration recognising that active steps must be taken to combat climate change was achieved in Geneva at the Second World Climate Conference (see page 196), and should lead to negotiations designed to culminate in 1992 (hopefully in Rio), with the signing of an international convention on global warming.

However, the US refusal to commit itself to any reduction in the greenhouse gases, or even to accept the need for such a measure, was the source of much bitterness, and the Declaration could only be agreed upon after much behind-the-scenes bargaining. The Bush administration fears that any attempt to diminish these emissions would be "intolerably disruptive" for the US economy and would require hugely expensive cuts in the burning of fossil fuels. The USA is not only one of the largest carbon dioxide emitters, it is also a highly inefficient one in its use of energy.

Some observers say that the US failure to act is a result of the inter-agency decision-making process. Others put a name on the problem: John Sununu, the White House Chief of Staff, who has ensured that policy in this area is in his hands alone. President Bush's own views on the subject are not so clear. During his election campaign, he promised to attack the problem vigorously. Since then, he has resorted to the "uncertainty" claim surrounding global warming.

Action on CO₂ emissions, in particular by the European Community, which has agreed to freeze overall carbon dioxide emissions at today's level by 2000 (see page 207), Australia (which has a powerful coal industry), and Japan (which has the world's most energy efficient industrial economy), has left the United States more isolated than ever. This probably accounts for the extraordinary attack on these two countries, together with the UK and France, contained in the White House briefing issued just before the Conference began. It claims that the new policies are "all a shell game", as these countries are not "making legal commitments". The same briefing talks about getting "serious in February". We shall see.

The General Assembly of IUCN - The World Conservation Union, is meeting in Perth from 28 November - 5 December.

During the meeting there have been 12 two-day workshops featuring topics such as the biodiversity convention; the environmental implications of global climate change; a conservation strategy for Antarctica; protection of the marine environment; tropical forests; and the World Conservation Strategy for the 1990s.

A report on the Assembly, including those resolutions with a legal component (of the estimated 90-plus to be adopted!), will be printed in the next issue of the journal.

The meeting on stronger protection for the Antarctic environment (see page 204) has just ended, and we have been informed that no agreement has so far been reached on the crucial points. As expected, the debate over the possibility of mining and oil drilling has blocked progress on other issues. Discussions are continuing, and the Parties have taken away a draft working paper for a protocol on environmental protection which will be discussed when they meet again in April in Madrid.

In the last issue (see page 137), we announced that the draft African convention on transboundary movements of hazardous wastes was to be submitted in December to a three-day expert meeting in Bamako. In the meantime, we have heard that this meeting has been postponed until a later date. We shall report on developments.

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- Wolfgang B. Truempy -