

EDITORIAL

The 45th Session of the UN General Assembly (see page 2), had before it several environmentally related topics.

Of particular interest were the preparations for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); in this respect the Assembly endorsed the relevant resolutions from the UNCED meeting in Nairobi, concerning the time and venue of the meeting (see page 2). So although a decision on the Conference agenda has still not been taken, we know that it will definitely be held in Rio around World Environment Day 1992.

Everyone hopes that representation will be at the recommended Head of State or Government level. With this in mind, the Brazilian President has said that he intends to invite these dignitaries for a weekend to the restored opera house in Manaus. Hopefully, the Heads of States don't simply decide to come for the trip up the Amazon - because although the sugar pink villa may be worth seeing, more constructive "theatre" should be going on in Rio for a longer time.

Although the Assembly also accepted the resolution on NGO participation at UNCED, everything will depend on the details in the accompanying rules. We hope that they will be such that those Governments already in favour of a restrictive practice in this regard will not be too disapproving.

We expect that a third UNCED Working Group will be created on legal and institutional aspects. For the institutional aspects, several suggestions are already floating around for changing UNEP's mandate. Some contemplate adding to today's catalytic role and making the Programme more operational in the future. Others favour limiting UNEP's role to that of a tough coordination programme covering international environmental activities, especially within the UN family.

Hopefully, UNCED will proceed in its next meeting to being more explicit as to what this Conference - perhaps the largest summit gathering ever held - will actually do. For example, the possible drafting of an agenda for the 21st century, as suggested by its Secretary-General, Maurice Strong. We need to see where the Conference is moving, and what these actions should achieve. Time is short to make these decisions. On the other hand, there is general relief that UNCED won't have to draft conventions - for example on climate or biodiversity conservation - for signing.

One point on the agenda should be a discussion on a better international system to deal with violations of agreed international laws, for example, in times of war.

The Gulf conflict is, unfortunately, supplying us with enough examples of the necessity for enforcement of such agreements, rules or principles. (See also in this connection the report on the UNEP Inter-Agency Consultation on Environmental Consequences of the Gulf War on page 20).

* * *

The African States have signed the Convention on the Transport of Hazardous Substances (see vol. 20 at page 173), and at the same time decided on new environmental strategies. We shall report next time in detail.

Wolfgang R. Tenny

11 February 1991