

# EDITORIAL

*The first substantive meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (see page 190), was a very useful step in the Rio implementation process. The mood of the delegates was good throughout, although discussions in the negotiating groups often needed considerable time before consensus could be reached, including night sessions.*

*NGO participation was very satisfactory - probably because not too many were there, and most of those participating were familiar with UN proceedings. NGOs with no UN experience can achieve very little in such a gathering, while NGOs with more knowledge of the system can be very effective, especially if working together. The NGO publication "Earth Negotiations Bulletin" was an appreciated daily source of conference reporting. Indeed, the two editors had become so used to working together, that a "plenary" proposal of marriage followed! We wish the couple a marriage of the same good quality!*

*Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, emphasised that the Commission's work is, in effect, a five year programme leading into the comprehensive assessment that will take place in the special session of the General Assembly in 1997. He added that the Secretary-General sees the follow-up to Rio as the major vehicle for strengthening the UN's role in the development process, and that the system was getting itself organised to respond to the challenges of Agenda 21. The UN family illustrated its will for cooperation and it was recognised, in particular, that UNEP and its task were very well represented by Elizabeth Dowdeswell, UNEP's Executive Director (and this issue's "cover-girl"!).*

*It was a surprise to see Mostafa Tolba, UNEP's former Executive-Director, as Head of the Egyptian delegation and who demonstrated his ability to represent the room from the other angle. It is good to see that he is one of the appointees to the High-Level Commission.*

*The only source of complaint can be said to be the time-lag in preparing and translating some of the documents during the meeting. For example, one document (L.7) was expected at 10.00 o'clock. The French version arrived first, and delegates had to wait until 11.40 before the English version was ready for distribution, which meant that the meeting had to be delayed.*

*The Commission's Chairman, Razali Ismail, must be complimented for his patience and sometimes toughness, in conducting the meeting. On the other hand, he was not tough enough with the Ministers. At the High-Level Segment he said that he was hoping for a dialogue, rather than the reading of up to 50 statements. However, this was not to be. The Indian Minister commenced by reading his long statement. Denmark's representative, who reacted by saying that he had confiscated his own manuscript, tried to start a discussion, in which he also noted that Denmark was expanding its ODA to 1.5% of its GNP. Other delegates too, such as the Australian and German Ministers also summarized their original texts in order to push the discussion.*

*There was also mention that for the next session of the Commission, the High-Level segment could take place immediately before the meeting.*

*To repeat, altogether a good start, with a number of possibilities for improvement.*

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*The UN General Assembly has confirmed the appointment of James Gustave Speth as Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for a four-year term of office, on the retirement of William H. Draper III. - We were on hand to immediately give our congratulation.*

*We have had a long connection with Gus during his time with the World Resources Institute and his appointment is a guarantee for a proper merging of development and environment.*

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