

EDITORIAL

The long-awaited Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly is now behind us (see page 388) and in this respect we also deal with developments in the Commission on Sustainable Development.

In the last issue (page 164) we reported on the Intersessional Meeting of the CSD in preparing for UNGASS.

The Meeting finished with a Programme of 137 paragraphs, containing a Statement of Commitment instead of a declaration, a section with the assessment of progress made since UNCED, a section on Implementation in areas requiring urgent action, with more than ninety paragraphs, and another one dealing with international institutional arrangements. An annex, detailing the multiyear programme of work of the CSD from 1998–2002, when the next review conference is scheduled, is printed at the end of the paper. Extracts from parts of the Programme, dealing not only with purely legal aspects, are printed on pages 421–426.

The adoption of the report containing the Programme concluded six weeks of formal and one week of informal intergovernmental negotiations – more than three weeks during the fifth session of the CSD in April, one week of consultations prior to the Special Session and the entire week of the meeting, plus many days of informal consultations among regional and other groups.

The reports in the media on the Special Session were mostly negative, but for no justified reason.

– Yes, the review showed what all were aware of before, that what was promised in Rio had not been sufficiently forthcoming. Much had been achieved, but a lot more still had to be done. The reason for this was and is due in part to insufficient political will but also partly to increasing financial constraints all over the world.

– Yes, the negotiation of a political declaration of the Heads of State and Government present could not be achieved. The demands for the content were too diverse. Nobody wanted to give way, and many of the developed countries, for example, said that the insistence on binding financial contributions lacked reality in view of the world economic situation – the millions of unemployed and other complex social problems.

What was left of the declaration is now the above-mentioned Statement of Commitment (see page 421).

The implementation section of the Programme should be read properly before making a judgement on the success or failure of the Session. The draft came from the Intersessional Meeting through the CSD with nearly 200 brackets and the negotiations in the Committee of the Whole took place partly in public, but also as was normal, in sub-groups, partly behind closed doors, and beyond the time foreseen until late on the 27th. This meant that the final General Assembly could only start after midnight in the early morning of the 28 June. So media reporting on the details could not be undertaken properly and judgements were formed before the final decisions had been taken.

What made it especially difficult for observers to understand was that final decisions dealt only with those parts of the CSD text still in brackets. So in order to study the result seriously both papers need to be read together. The paper that the General Assembly agreed upon contained only the amendments to the CSD paper; and even the experts present and not involved in the negotiations, have needed time for digestion.

In fact, what we have now is a Programme agreed by all States present with one minor reservation (see page 394) for the further implementation of Agenda 21, and the weight of one aspect will already be on the scales in December in Kyoto, for the Climate Change Conference.

* * *

The new High-Level Committee of Ministers, the reason for the breaking point at the last UNEP Governing Council (see vol. 27 at pages 95 and 104), has started work: Seven hours after the General Assembly Special Session closed, on the same morning.

A priority list has been discussed and a reform proposal for UNEP is expected for a special session of the Governing Council in 1998.

21 July, 1997

- Wolfgang R. Steyer -

P.S.: After closing this issue we received the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", extracts of which are printed on pages 428–429. We shall report on the developments.