

EDITORIAL

We hope that the long awaited improvement of UNEP has begun. The former German Minister for the Environment Klaus Töpfer (see last Editorial), has not only become UNEP's Executive Director but also the Director-General of the UN Office in Nairobi and Head of the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). In addition, UN Secretary Kofi Annan has asked Klaus Töpfer to chair a task force to prepare proposals for strengthening activities in the field of environmental law. So now that so many tasks and powers are assembled, we can expect positive future developments in the field of sustainable development.

On taking up his work on 7 February, Klaus Töpfer emphasised UNEP's catalytic role and responsibility, at a time of increasing globalisation, to ensure that "economic growth must be accompanied by environmental and social developments which in turn can make economic achievements sustainable." At the same time, he noted that it would take "extraordinary, dedicated efforts to bring environmental issues back to the centre of global political activity."

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In his first address to ECOSOC this year, the UN Secretary-General noted that there was a new political consensus on strengthening the Economic and Social Council and that "this opportunity must be seized". However, he said that reform issues still remained on the Council's agenda and that reform of ECOSOC was, in some ways, "a test case for the Organisation's ability to enhance relevance and impact".

Also under the umbrella of ECOSOC, the first meeting of the Sixth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development was held on 21 December.

At its 1997 session, ECOSOC, acting upon a recommendation of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly, decided to change the pattern of elections of the Chairman and other members of the Bureau of the CSD: The goal being to ensure that the same Chair and other persons on the Bureau lead the preparations for the session of the CSD during which they will chair meetings (to date, the old Bureau prepared for the next session and the new one chaired the meeting). Consequently, the Chair and Bureau of the Seventh Session (the substantive part of which will be held in Spring 1999), will be elected on 1 May 1998, during the first "organisational" meeting of that session, which will take place immediately after the conclusion of the Sixth Session from 20 April–1 May 1998.

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The last meeting of the Working Group for the "preparation of a draft convention on access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making," under the auspices of the Committee on Environmental Policy of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, will be held at the beginning of March. A report is planned for the next issue of the Journal.

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You may be surprised to find no report on the Kyoto Climate Conference in this issue. Why, you will see on page 11.

- Wolfgang R. Steyer -

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