

EDITORIAL

One often hears in the news about important international conferences, but few realise the true dimensions involved in reaching a multilateral agreement. More often than not, only the outcome is reported on, and not the details of the negotiation process itself. There is also not much literature on what goes on around and beyond the negotiation tables.

It is for this reason, that we are especially thankful to Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Iran) for taking on the difficult task of presenting a detailed history of the preparations leading up to UN General Assembly resolution 53/242. We have already briefly reported on the adoption of this document (see issue 29 (5)), but given the tremendous repercussions for the future of UNEP and the exemplary nature of the process, we thought it would be worth giving our readers an in-depth look behind the scenes.

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During the 54th and 55th Plenary meetings of the fifty-fourth Session, the United Nations General Assembly marked the end of the United Nations Decade of International Law (see also p. 72). Following an address on the topic by the President of the Assembly, UN Legal Counsel Hans Corell read a message from the Secretary-General. It expressed the sentiment, and everyone agreed, that the activities launched during the Decade should be continued to the same extent.

*The IUCN Law Commission and ICEL at this occasion presented the up-dated text of the Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development to the Member States of the United Nations.**

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The preparations for the UNEP environmental law programme for the first decade of the 21st Century, Montevideo III, are underway. At the first meeting of the International Group of Expert, it was discussed which tasks are to receive highest priority. The general feeling was that implementation – in addition to filling in the gaps – should be the most important goal. The Secretary-General demonstrated how very involved he is in this aspect of international law when he pleaded in his Singapore Lecture “Global Values – The UN and the Rule of Law in the 21st Century” for full implementation and enforcement of international law rooted in shared global values.

After the next meeting, scheduled for April, we shall be able to see in which direction the programme is moving.

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We recognise the EU decision concerning Austria and its new government to be completely appropriate, but we must note that this has lead to anomalies within the diplomatic community at the United Nations.

For example, last year there was a consensus within the Western European and other States Group to propose Austria as one of the Co-Chairs of the Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development within the CSD. However, at this year's first meeting Mohammad Reza Salamat (Iran) was elected by acclamation, but Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria) only by 11 to 1 – with 24 abstentions! For a long time she had been a very successful division chief in the Austrian Ministry of Environment and appointed by the former government as Ambassador to the UN in Vienna. This illustrates how a policy decision can affect competent government officials who are not responsible for the political situation of their home country.

17 March, 2000

- Wolfgang B. S. -

* For more information on how to order a copy of the Draft Covenant, please contact IUCN Publication Services Unit, 219 Huntington Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, UK.