

EDITORIAL

The concerns surrounding environmental policy and sustainable development are becoming increasingly a central factor in all political discussions – a fact we acknowledge with satisfaction. Each G8 Summit Declaration and the Final Communiqués from the Summits of the EU Heads of State, and now the Millennium Summit Declaration (see page 263) contain a section concerning this area, which has a major impact on general policy.

The situation, however, is different with regard to the controversy surrounding globalisation. In his Report, the UN Secretary-General acknowledges that arguments over the costs and benefits of globalisation have intensified, but he notes that as we confront the complex and profound changes being wrought by globalisation, the most important means to end poverty is still through sustainable development. Although there have recently been no international conferences or meetings where long, drawn-out and heated discussions on the pros and cons of globalisation have not taken place, no section in any final paper has tried to lead on from these discussions. The UN Secretary-General has now announced that he is engaged in an intensive process of reflection on the institutional and policy implications of globalisation. Until now, we have not introduced this dialogue into the journal - but as soon as we have the impression that the process is finally leading to some decisions, we will address it in future issues.

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This Autumn has been a busy time for international negotiations. In addition to the Millennium Summit we have seen the meetings of the FCCC Subsidiary Bodies (see page 217), the IMF/World Bank meetings in Prague, the IUCN General Assembly (a report is planned for the next issue) and soon to come, the expert discussions on the Montevideo III programme. Many participants in these gatherings have demonstrated all-round scepticism and cynicism and many observers are asking what all this high-level activity is actually achieving. For example, the FCCC Executive Secretary Michael Zammit Cutajar, has said that only with “real political leadership” can success be achieved at the forthcoming Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention. We notice, however, that recently this has been clearly lacking in most fora.

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In this issue we again publish a report which discusses the term “right to water as a human right” (see page 248), with which we have no problem in this instance. However, we do have a problem with how the term “human rights” is currently being used. We have the impression that there is increasingly a trend to enlarge the list of human rights by what may be justified requests, but which are, in fact, economic and social rights. This brings with it the danger that human rights, as we understand them now, could be weakened if requirements are to be incorporated which are not one hundred per cent capable of being fully implemented.

17 October 2000

- Wolfgang R. Steyer -