

EDITORIAL

The 4th WSSD PrepCom – and the last one before Johannesburg – is over.

The final session, in the International Conference Centre in Bali, finished at 3.40 in the morning, the day after it was scheduled to end. Its start was postponed three times, as there was a general feeling that the results in preparing a plan of implementation for the WSSD decisions were insufficient.

We lawyers are used to living with square brackets, and when one looks through the draft plan that had been submitted, there are certainly enough of these! Now all sides in the negotiations, especially the United States, the G-77/China and the European Union, have little time to rethink their inability to compromise. If they do not achieve this, there will be no result.

Compromise should not be too difficult, since Agenda 21 was agreed in Rio by consensus and we have now reviewed its implementation and are drafting a plan for further implementation. There is basically nothing new.

Pressure is not helping – for example, an announcement by some delegations that if the “other” side did not agree, they would advise their Heads of State or Government not to go to Johannesburg – is certainly not a solution.

We will be there, and we shall report on more than will be read in the press!

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There was, however, the following highlight in Bali: everyone was happy that Japan had presented ratification instruments for the Kyoto Protocol. However, no-one was happy that the US opposed the request to include in the plan of implementation the request that all States should ratify.

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The annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) ended in bitterness because while the moratorium outlawing commercial hunting remains in force, the gap between the opposing sides is bigger than ever.

No solution was found to ensure the renewal of the hunting quota for Arctic Circle aboriginal communities, blocked by Japan by its single vote. The action was termed “the most unjust and nasty vote ever” by the US delegate. The New Zealand delegate noted that “when the Arctic Winter cuts them off, these communities must know that they are being punished by political manipulators, by people who only have to walk to the end of the street to buy food.”

The current quota expires at the end of this year, and many delegates believe that the IWC will lose what is left of its reputation if no solution is found at its next meeting in Berlin in 2003.

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In this connection, the inaugural meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – has taken place. Its mandate is to advise and make recommendations – the first time that indigenous people have served as “independent experts” for the United Nations.

The experts do not function as representatives of their peoples, but rather in their own capacities. The Forum will meet once each year for 10 working days.

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- Wolfgang R. Steyer -