

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

New Environmental Law Centre for the Developing World

The Parvez Hassan Environmental Law Centre (PHELIC) was inaugurated on 15 February 2003 in Lahore (Pakistan). The 350 participants included the Governor of the Punjab, also in his capacity as Chancellor of the University, the Chief Justice, several Vice-Chancellors and Deans of Law Schools, the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), educationalists, business leaders, government officials and the non-governmental community.

As the following short report cannot list all the activi-

ties or work of the donor, readers are referred to Vol. 31 (2001) No. 1 of *Environmental Policy and Law* at page 34 for details and Vol. 32 (2002), No. 2 at page 98.

Following the main speeches messages received from well-wishers from all over the world – including former prime ministers and people with whom the donor had worked – were displayed to be read by all participants.

In his remarks, Parvez Hassan explained that the idea of an Environmental Law Centre for the Punjab University was first mooted in February 2001. He said his wish

was to combine law, environmental law and Punjab University toward a capacity-building initiative that he had been urging for the last 10 years.

He recalled that in accepting the Elizabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Law (Brussels, November 2000, see above) he had spoken of the problems encountered in the enforcement of environmental protection in the developing countries. He said then that a critical reason that has prevented the enforcement of environmental protection regimes was the lack of professional and scientific capacity in developing countries. He reminded participants that starting in the 1970s, many developing countries enacted comprehensive environmental protection legislation with detailed provisions. These laws, in many cases, established high-level policy-making Councils supported by high-ranking national environmental protection agencies. The developing countries also signed many Multilateral Environmental Agreements. But he stressed that it requires more than writing laws and signing treaties to promote sustainable development. "A provision in the laws about environmental impact assessment is of no use if the country does not have the professional and technical ability to conduct and evaluate such assessments. Setting environmental quality standards for industrial emissions and effluents can make a difference only if the Environmental Protection Agencies give the laboratories, the equipment and technical administrators to police such standards. A strong cadre of environmental lawyers is needed to draft national laws for implementing international conventions and to otherwise enforce environmental protection laws.

"An aspect that worries me is the inadequate development of an environmental mindset in the developing countries. There is no serious effort in these countries to encourage environmental education and to develop institutions and infrastructure to meet the challenges ahead. The result is that by default, the developing countries were

abdicated the interpretation of international environmental treaties to the self-serving interests of the developed societies. This imbalance must be immediately rectified. Otherwise, although the developing countries will have participated in the adoption of international environmental norms and conventions, the content of such norms will be determined by the developed countries. This would, I fear, be a condition as serious as the challenge in the 1060s to international law by the newly independent Afro-Asian countries on the ground that it [international law] had developed mostly on the basis of the European experiences and was not, therefore, universal."

The three people Parvez Hassan named as his mentors – Chief Justice Sardar Mohammad Iqbal, Syed Babar Ali and Wolfgang Burhenne – were requested to hand over the keys of the Centre on his behalf to the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University. Following this, a reception was held for all participants.

The ceremony was moderated throughout by the donor's children, Yasmeen and Omar.

The new Centre, which has financial and academic autonomy, is part of the Punjab University and its Faculty of Law. The beautiful building incorporates an auditorium for 400 people, two lecture rooms each holding up to 60 people, small seminar rooms, a library and administrative offices. The buildings surround a central courtyard (see cover photograph). It was decided to name the Centre after the donor, and the rooms are named after his parents and children. Books for the new library have been received, *inter alia*, from the Asian Pacific Centre of Environmental Law (APCEL) in Singapore and all further contributions to the library from all the world will be most welcome.

The Centre is already planning an environmental law symposium, which it hopes can be held before the end of this year. (MJ)

