

EDITORIAL

Worldwide, politicians and lawyers interested in the environment have been waiting for the result of the US election and now hope for a change in policy, particularly regarding the ratifications of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kyoto Protocol. All three matters are critical, especially among Arctic States which have indicated that progress can only be achieved through common efforts. President-elect Obama – if able to prioritise and coordinate his policies – has an opportunity to freshen the approach to international cooperation.

Lifelong Republicans, William Ruckelshaus and Russell Train have specifically thrown their weight behind US ratification of UNCLOS and confirmed in a common editorial that Senator McCain – once an ally of ratification – lost their vote due to his changed position.

In anticipation of the ratification of UNCLOS by the US, a special colloquium is being planned to commemorate the long commitment of Elliott Richardson and Louis B. Sohn to the development of the Law of the Sea.

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Conservation organisations have to play a strong role in addressing the effects of armed conflict on nature. The 4th World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources reached agreement after contentious discussions as to what is appropriate and necessary to achieve at least some results (these and other outcomes of WCC-4 will be presented in EPL issue 39/1). As violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo flares once again, the threat to mountain gorillas illustrates the need for more engagement by the international conservation movement to tackle the issue of armed conflict and its effect on the environment.

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It is disheartening to learn that, despite worldwide initiatives, CO₂ levels in the atmosphere continue to rise. Scientists from the Global Carbon Projects report that 2007 set a new record, with China overtaking the United States as the world's leading emitter. Furthermore, a new report from UNEP cites that the impact of climate change on glaciers, agriculture and the monsoon is becoming clearer.

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In better news, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is seeking closer cooperation between Central Asia and the rest of Asia to achieve sustainable development amongst the current climate of multiple challenges. We congratulate the Executive Secretary, Noeleen Heyzer on her initiative and hope to report on the results soon.

25 November 2008

- Wolfgang Ruckelshaus -