

EDITORIAL

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This is a report on decisions in the making. It is generally agreed that the decision-making process in the environmental sphere is becoming increasingly tougher. In the early period, following the 1972 UN Conference on the Environment, the process was a less complicated one. Nowadays, more and more aspects have to be taken into consideration and the balance weighed. The process is, at the same time so open, and yet contained, as our title photograph!

The High-level Conference on the Environment within the framework of the UN Economic Commission for Europe met in Geneva from 13 - 16 November. The Council of the European Community had already presented a draft resolution to national legislators to sign the proposed Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, together with the draft resolution on low and non-waste technology and the reutilization and recycling of wastes.

Before going to press we have learnt that the parties have adopted the Convention. This represents a major diplomatic achievement, involving as it does virtually all the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, with the U.S. and Canada. It is one of the more striking examples of East-West cooperation, foreseen in the 1975 Helsinki Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and a direct consequence of the Brezhnev proposal made at that time. The meeting envisaged that as a result of the resolutions adopted a greater work load will descend on the Secretariat, and a way has to be found to make the necessary resources and funds available. A detailed report of the meeting will be published in the next issue.

Also under the auspices of ECE, a seminar on environmental impact assessment was held in Villach, Austria, from 24 - 29 September. Several recommendations were adopted concerning the basic principles for assessment of the environmental impact of patterns of economic development and others of use to public authorities responsible for the review and authorization of actions, such as plans, programmes and projects. These recommendations, which will be submitted to the next meeting of the Senior Advisers and thereafter directly to governments, will be printed in the coming issue as selected documents.

The fourth session of the Working Group of Experts on Environmental Law, met in Geneva from 2 - 12 October. In his opening statement, Mostafa K. Tolba, UNEP Executive Director, recalled that the Governing Council had requested the group to conclude as soon as possible the Guidelines on off-shore mining and drilling for use in national jurisdiction and to prepare a list of priority subject areas with which the group will concern itself in its future work, in readiness for the next session of the Governing Council. He promised to increase especially the help from the Secretariat. The group had itself fixed 1980 as the year during which it hoped to complete the entire work on off-shore mining and drilling. However, following the meagre results of the recent session, it is doubtful if this can be achieved in the set time. Difficulties have arisen on many points and it will undoubtedly require further meetings to reach satisfactory results.

In the last issue we announced that the "Charter for Nature" would be published this time. However, the President of Zaire, who originally asked for such a charter, has not yet officially received it. As a date has now been set for the official presentation, we shall publish it in the first issue of volume 6.

We received a letter welcoming the publication of the Draft Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources in the February issue of Environmental Policy and Law. It contained the following comment, by the former Australian Prime Minister, E. G. Whitlam, in a book review published in the Australian Financial Review on Friday, 24 August 1979 of interest to our readers:

"Mr. Willesee was preparing an initiative for the internationalisation of Antarctic resources.

In the last three years the Department of Foreign Affairs has been condemned to devote an immense proportion of its diminishing resources to a fatuous exercise to support territorial claims which other nations do not recognise and Australia cannot justify.

The 1959 Antarctic Treaty, a conservation arrangement, has attracted 20 members. After 20 years it is no longer possible to shelve the exploitation of Antarctica's resources or to leave the situation to 20 nations, and mostly developed ones at that.

Whenever this question comes before the General Assembly it will be resolved that those resources are the common heritage of mankind."

Ladies/Gentlemen:

I am a regular reader of Environmental Policy and Law. I find it a most interesting and useful publication, particularly because you publish some important documents not easily found elsewhere. I do have one suggestion concerning the documents, though. Would it be possible to include the date and official document symbol for each document? That way a researcher wishing to refer to the document would have both the official reference and the reference to your journal.

Thank you for considering this suggestion.

Frederic L. Kirgis, Jr.
Professor of Law and Director,
Frances Lewis Law Center
Washington and Lee University
Lexington, Virginia, U.S.A.

The editorial staff are grateful for proposals for improving the journal. Mr. Kirgis' suggestion will be adopted.