

New Headquarters for ELC Inaugurated

The new home in Bonn of the Environmental Law Centre of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), was officially inaugurated on 24 March 1999, under the joint auspices of the German Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU) and IUCN. The Centre had outgrown the building that had served as its home since its creation over thirty years ago.

The festive event took place not far from the old building, in the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, decorated for the occasion with the Hundertwasser posters created for the fiftieth anniversary of IUCN, and with the text of the Charter for Nature in all available languages.

Maritta von Bieberstein Koch-Weser, the newly appointed Director General of IUCN, addressed the audience, as did BMU State Secretary Gila Altmann, and the Lord Mayor of Bonn, Bärbel Dieckmann.

The new Director General recalled that the recognition of the role of law in conservation started in Bonn in the early sixties, when a group of visionaries created an international network of lawyers active in fields such as water, forest and wildlife legislation. The Environmental Law Centre, created in 1970, had the dual function of servicing the network and developing activities of its own, such as an Environmental Law Information System. "The Programme was the first of its kind, initiating the development and drafting of important regional and global treaties – such as the Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species, and the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity – which collectively provide a holistic response to the global environmental challenges of our era," she said.

State Secretary Altmann noted that the permanent presence of the Law Centre in Bonn would ensure that the international institutions located in the city would continue to enjoy direct access to the legal groundwork performed by the Law Centre.

The Lord Mayor expressed her pleasure that the ELC had chosen Bonn as its permanent location. "The largest data base worldwide for environmental policy, as well as the largest collection of relevant legislative texts means that there is an institution in the city that makes essential contributions towards preparing international

environmental agreements and, above all, advises developing countries in questions of environmental legislation."

Wolfgang Burhenne – this time in his capacity as Coordinator of the UNEP German Committee – conveyed a message from Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, on his behalf.

The UNEP Executive Director stressed that for UNEP, the work of the IUCN Law Centre and the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law is important: "UNEP and IUCN have concluded some time ago a Memorandum of Understanding which provides, inter alia, for cooperation in the field of environmental law; and this cooperation has concretised in an increasing number of cases. Prominent examples are the Joint Environmental Law Information Service, ...and the implementation of the joint UNEP-UNDP Project on Environmental Legislation and Institutions in Africa (in this connection I should also mention APCEL), in which IUCN is a partner."

Klaus Töpfer said that there are, and will be, other synergies between the work of UNEP and IUCN Environmental Law Programmes: "The Governing Council of UNEP, in February, decided to revisit UNEP environmental law activities, and produce a new programme to be adopted in the year 2000.

IUCN already contributed to the development and implementation of the first UNEP programmatic effort in the field of law – the so-called Montevideo Programme. I am confident that IUCN will contribute again, not only in advising on the shape of this next step, but also in devising its own environmental law programme to support and complement the efforts of UNEP."

Francoise Burhenne-Guilmin, Head of the ELC since its inception, had decided that the move was an appropriate time for her to step down from the ELC post. All speakers paid great tribute to her achievements.

Charles Di Leva has been appointed General Counsel to the Director General and Head, Environmental Law Programme, based at the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, and will start his new assignment on 1 July. He was present at the inauguration ceremony, and related events. □