

REFERENCES TO OTHER TOPICS

UN/WSSD: Roundtable Meetings

The 10-year review of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – *i.e.*, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, will be held in Johannesburg, from 2-11 September 2002 (see also last issue at pages 199). It is hoped that it will reinvigorate, at the highest level, political commitment to the issue of sustainable development.

Agenda 21, the blueprint for action in various fields of sustainable development, was one of the outcomes of UNCED. However, since 1992, social and economic indicators reveal that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened – both within national boundaries and between States. More people now live on incomes below poverty levels.

“The international community has not yet got to grips with sustainable development,” said Nitin Desai, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), in announcing the start of a 15-month process leading up to the Johannesburg Summit.

The goal of the preparations is to yield ideas for translating general concepts of development and environmental protection into concrete plans for action. To that end, between now and the next intergovernmental preparatory meeting in January 2002, there will be regional meetings, round tables and substantive work done by major groups, including youth, women, local governments, indigenous people, business, and non-governmental organisations.

The United Nations Summit Secretariat is organising a series of regional round tables. Approximately 25-30 eminent independent experts in the field of sustainable development will be invited to each round table. The main objective is to elaborate practical proposals and suggest innovative approaches aimed at advancing the sustainable development agenda. The reports of all the round tables will be submitted to the regional inter-governmental preparatory meetings to be held later in the year, as well as to the first Global Preparatory Committee meeting in January 2002.

To start the series, a round table meeting for Europe and North America, organised in collaboration with the Denver-based Centre for Resource Management, was held in Vail in June 2001. This will be followed by the round table meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Barbados from 18-20 June. The round table for Africa will be held in Cairo from 25-27 June; the East Asia and the Pacific meeting will be held in Malaysia from 9-11 July; and the round table meeting for Central and South Asia will be held in Kyrgyzstan from 30 July to 1 August 2001.

Polar Regions: Increase in Environmental Damage

In a report published on 11 June, a working party of the programme for the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF*) warned of the over-exploitation, fragmentation and pollution of natural habitats, with significant climate change. It emphasised that distance does not protect polar regions from environmental threats to the rest of the planet.

The study “Arctic Flora and Fauna: Status and Conservation,” conducted over two years and involving more than 150 experts from the Nordic regions, represents the first circumpolar analysis of the Arctic environment. It collates data collected at the local and regional levels and draws a precise picture of the current state and trends of flora and fauna in the region – the size and change of populations – and provides a list of endangered species in the Arctic zone. It also draws attention to serious gaps in information on many regions.

The experts have identified several causes for concern. At the local level, there is clear evidence of over-exploitation of certain species of key economic importance, as well as the fragmentation and pollution of natural habitats as a result of human activity. Climate change also has a significant impact on the region, which can be measured on Arctic species, the permafrost, marine ice and invasive species from outside making increasing inroads into the area. Numerous pollutants have been identified which, although discharged thousands of miles away, are present in high levels in both human and animal communities.

* The Nordic Council through a Ministerial Declaration at Rovaniemi, Finland in 1991 established CAFF as part of the adopted Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). Its work covers protected areas, species conservation mapping vegetation and monitoring of biodiversity.

Meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Environment Ministers

Representatives of the 27 Euro-Mediterranean Environment Ministries convened in Brussels on 25 and 26 June for their third annual meeting.

Delegates exchanged information on the implementation up to now of SMAP policy objectives (Short- and Medium-term priority environmental Action Programmes) in the form of short na-

tional reports. They began discussions on guidelines for future actions in the context of a joint effort to improve the effectiveness of their work. The need to integrate environmental considerations, in particular at the national level, and in anticipation of the establishment of a sustainable Euro-Mediterranean free trade area around 2010, was highlighted during the session.

The delegates welcomed Greece's proposal to host the second Euro-Mediterranean Conference on the Environment in mid-2002. There was a first exchange of views on preparations for this event, which should in principle draft a contribution for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), to be held in September 2002.

The SMAP programme consists of a series of actions on the protection of the Mediterranean environment in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The SMAP correspondents, who meet once a year, have selected five priority areas for action: integrated water management, waste management, polluted sectors and threatened biodiversity, integrated management of coastal zones and combating desertification.

Call to Halt Shark Hunting

A petition organised by the UK Liberal Democrat MEP Chris Davies and the animal welfare organisations The Shark Trust and Wild Aid, was handed to Margot Wallström, European Commissioner for the Environment. It calls on the European Union to follow the example of South Africa, the US, Oman, Brazil and Costa Rica, and ban finning, or the hunting of sharks for their fins, which end up in shark soup, which is popular in certain Asian countries.

Nearly one hundred million sharks are killed globally each year, many just for their fins, which are hacked off before the sharks are thrown back into the ocean often still alive. It is thought that millions of sharks are discarded in this way every year. Certain shark species are threatened with extinction.

According to the statistics available, Spain is one of the world's major producers of shark fins, exporting nearly 2,000 metric tonnes to Hong Kong in 1999. Other European countries exporting shark fin in 1999 were Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. EU-registered boats are reported to be involved in these finning and discarding operations. Nearly 23,000 blue sharks are reported to have been fished in the North-East Atlantic and up to 82 per cent of these are reported to be discarded because of their low value.

WTO: Law Centre

The Advisory Centre on WTO Law will be formally established in Geneva on 17 July. This is an independent law centre that aims to help developing countries take and defend cases in the World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement system.

A US\$12 million trust fund endowed by the 32 member governments will finance the Centre, which will have five legal officers. The main contributors are Canada, Norway and European Union members, including the Netherlands and the UK.

OECD: Sustainable Transport Guidelines

On 16 May, Environment Ministers from the Member States of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) approved a series of Guidelines for Sustainable Transport. The Guidelines, which have been under development since 1998, provide 10 key steps governments can take to realise environmentally sustainable transport in the future. The Guidelines call on governments to:

- 1) Develop a long-term vision of a desirable transport future that is sustainable for the environment and health while providing the benefits of mobility and access;
- 2) Assess long-term transport trends, considering all aspects of transport, their health and environmental impacts, and the economic and social implications of continuing with a "business as usual" approach;
- 3) Define health and environmental quality objectives, based on health and environmental criteria, standards, and sustainability requirements;
- 4) Set quantified, sector-specific targets derived from the environmental and health quality objectives, including target dates and milestones; and
- 5) Identify strategies to achieve environmentally sustainable transport and combinations of measures to ensure technological enhancement and changes in transport activity.

The Guidelines also call on governments to, among other things,

- assess the social and economic implications of these strat-

egies, ensuring consistency with social and economic sustainability;

- set provisions for monitoring implementation and for public reporting on the Environmentally Sustainable Transport Strategy, including use of consistent, well-defined indicators that ensure follow-up action; and
- build broad support and cooperation for implementation of new policies, by raising public awareness and improving education on the transport issue.

Copies of the Guidelines, and additional information, are available at <http://www.oecd.org>.

International Whaling Commission

The IWC will meet in London on 18 July to finalise the wording of a "revised management scheme" that would eventually allow commercial whaling to resume. The scheme would be voted on at the main meeting later in the month. More information in the next issue.

Nuclear Waste

Norway and Russia have agreed on measures to enhance safety at Russia's Andreev nuclear waste dump, regarded as one of the most dangerous on the Kola peninsula in North-Western Russia.

The first measure consists of the construction of a roof over the nuclear waste dump, which is currently open to the elements. The second measure concerns the establishment of "effective" healthcare for staff employed at the facility.

Space Co-operation

Three of the themes identified in the context of a plan to promote space-related cooperation between the EU and Russia are launch operations, developing the Galileo satellite navigation system and preparing the "global monitoring of the environment and safety" (GMES). This was the result of a meeting held in Moscow on 8 June in the Russian Parliament between representatives of the European Commission, the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Parliament and industry.

Participants also reviewed joint activities now under way, particularly the impetus of the new European Space Strategy adopted in November 2000.

GMO Detection Laboratory

A laboratory for studying molecular biology and specialising in the detection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has been set up in France.

In an effort to respond to the new EU Directive on labelling for food products containing more than one per cent genetically-modified organisms, the *Institut Français des boissons et de la malterie de Vandoeuvre* aims to detect and quantify the GMOs present in specific products. (There are currently fewer than 10 laboratories in the whole of Europe that carry out tests quantifying GMOs.)

China: Battle against Drought

China is suffering the worst drought in a decade. Millions of people have been left without drinking water and official forecasts of winter wheat harvests have forced the government to ration water for use in industry.

The latest drought has been most severe in the north, and affected one of the country's most abundant agricultural provinces, Shandong, where rainfall this year has been 70 per cent less than average.

The drought has highlighted China's long-term problems in securing a stable water supply for its growing cities and agriculture. The government has announced plans to divert southern rivers to the north, involving a huge, billion-dollar project vital to overcoming chronic water shortages and the creeping aridity already so serious that it endangers economic development.

The project is aimed at saving the Yellow River, which runs dry most years, and maintaining the agricultural and industrial viability of most of the north of the country.

The governor of Liaoning province, farther north, has ordered strict water rationing for citizens and industry and introduced surcharges on the price of water of up to 1,000 per cent for users breaching the restrictions.

More than a third of the province's 900 reservoirs have run dry and 80 per cent of the arable land has been declared a natural disaster area. The largest river has also stopped flowing for the first time in half a century.

