

REFERENCES TO OTHER TOPICS

UN: Global Reporting Initiative

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), an international clearing-house for voluntary disclosure by corporations on social and environmental issues, was formally launched on 4 April as a permanent institution.

The GRI is a project of the Boston-based Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Its aim is to serve a need for an international standards body that could make reporting on sustainable development "as routine as financial reporting while achieving the highest standards of consistency and rigour," the sponsors said.

The GRI complements the Global Compact, a similar UN project setting principles for corporate conduct in protecting human rights, labour standards and the environment.

The GRI project relies on sustainability reporting guidelines designed with the participation of thousands of representatives from business, accounting, investment, environmental, human rights and labour organisations around the world. Already 110 of the world's largest corporations have subscribed to the guidelines.

A permanent secretariat for the project will be housed in Amsterdam, with plans for regional offices in the United States, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

A new version of the reporting guidelines will be issued in July 2002 after two years of consultations with stakeholder groups and testing by dozens of corporations.

CCD: Calls for Financial Commitments

On 14 June, the eighth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),

Executive Secretary Hama Arba Diallo called on the international community to make financial commitments to enable countries affected by land degradation to implement the Convention and "move from preparation to the implementation of national action programmes".

As the only Convention to stem directly from a recommendation of Agenda 21, the Executive Secretary said that the Convention is a key instrument in addressing both poverty alleviation and environmental protection within the framework of sustainable development.

Canada: Transport of Dangerous Goods

The Canadian government has proposed amendments to the Transport of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Regulations, to better protect public safety and the environment.

The relevant government department has said that the proposed changes bring the regulations in line with new international standards, and correct errors and omissions in the regulations. The proposed amendments would update references in the regulations to the International Maritime Organisation's International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code and the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air.

Future of Europe Convention: More Proposals

Eight of the largest environmental groups, which call themselves the "Green G-8", have called for major changes to EU environmental laws and regulations, including a call for qualified majority voting on environmental issues rather than unanimous voting in the Council of Ministers.

They also urged that the EU Convention on the Future of Europe should include environmental rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and should require the Council of Ministers to meet in public when it debates or acts on legislative matters. Work on the Convention started in February 2002 and is expected to continue for a year. During that time, the EU will draw up a framework of new treaty changes. These proposed changes will be submitted to the EU Member States, which will consider them during an intergovernmental conference that will conclude in 2004.

Other proposals include a change in the Amsterdam Treaty's Art. 33 on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, as well as provisions that would allow environmental groups to take EU institutions to court for failing to implement EU law.

Some of the key issues under discussion in the convention concern whether to define better the competencies of EU institutions *vis-à-vis* those of Member State governments, as well as whether a second chamber should be added to the European Parliament.

A further issue being discussed is whether the EU's Charter for Fundamental Rights, which was agreed in 2000, should be adopted, since a constitution is also under consideration.

EU: 6th Action Programme Adopted

On 11 June, the EU Council of Ministers formally adopted a Decision establishing the Sixth EU Action Programme for the Environment to cover the 2001-2010 period. This is in keeping with the agreement reached on 13 March with the European Parliament (co-decision procedure).

The Sixth Action Programme is the environmental strand of the EU's sustainable development strategy, as defined during the EU Summit in Gothenburg in 2001. It pursues certain aims featured in the earlier programme, which ended in the year 2000, and spells out new ones by focusing on four key areas: climate change, nature and biodiversity, the environment/health and natural resources/waste management.

The European Parliament gave its approval in the third reading on 31 May, so the programme may be regarded as formally adopted.

Tax Harmonisation Guidelines

EU finance ministers have agreed to a set of guidelines for energy taxation harmonisation legislation, which contain a range of exemptions including some for energy-intensive industries and heavy vehicle transport.

Following a decision in March 2002 that will open EU energy markets to competition, EU Heads of State and Government were in accord that an agreement on energy taxation should be reached by the end of 2002.

A high-level working group of finance ministry officials from the Member States will try to reach a consensus on the agreed guidelines. One of the key hurdles still to be overcome in reaching an agreement is the demand by the United Kingdom that household energy use should be exempted.

EP: Environmental Liability Report

The House voted on 3 July, by 260 votes to 241, with 12 abstentions, for the proposed directive on environmental liability to remain with the Legal Affairs Committee as the lead committee and not to revert to the Environment Committee. The latter had been named as the committee responsible for this piece of draft legislation under a previous ruling, by three of Parliament's vice-presidents, before the political group leaders subsequently allocated it to the Legal Affairs Committee. The vote – an unprecedented procedural move – finally resolved a long-standing dispute between the two committees.

Before the vote, Giuseppe Garagni, Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee, told MEPs that his committee should be the lead committee as it had been following the subject since March 2000 and had written the report on the Commission's Green Paper on the issue. He also pointed to Parliament's rules which state that all matters relating to civil liability, irrespective of the sector concerned, are dealt with by the Legal Affairs Committee.

Caroline Jackson, Chair of the Environment Committee, argued that her committee should follow the legislation as it related to environmental policy, that it concerned the prevention and remedying of environmental damage and would be dealt with by the Environment Council.

Risks of Industrial Accidents

In the aftermath of an accident at a chemicals factory in Toulouse in September 2001, the Environment Committee demanded

in June 2002 that the risk of industrial accidents in built-up areas must be tackled.

The Committee welcomed the Commission's efforts to tighten up the Seveso II directive in response to the Baia Mare cyanide spill in Romania,¹ the explosion at a fireworks factory in the Netherlands and the AZF factory accident in Toulouse. But it says that the measures proposed do not go far enough.

In a report adopted unanimously in June 2002, the Committee calls for the directive's provisions on land-use planning to include guidelines for the harmonised assessment of the dangers presented by hazardous substances present at industrial plants in or near "sensitive areas".

The Committee also wants clearer definitions of and new thresholds for ammonium nitrate, the chemical that caused the explosion at the Toulouse plant. It supports the Commission's proposal to include mining operations in the scope of the legislation but wants to broaden the definition of them to ensure that plants such as Aznalcóllar, where there was a dam-burst in 1998, are not excluded.

MEPs point out that the AZF plant in Toulouse was covered by the current Seveso II directive, but that its owners failed to comply with it, and they want plants to be closed if it is found that safety rules have been broken. They are also calling for the provisions on safety reports, hazard studies, emergency plans and public information to be tightened up. Pointing to the large number of sub-contractors on the Toulouse site at the time of the accident, the Committee is calling for compulsory accident prevention and emergency training for all employees, including sub-contracted workers.

The report is scheduled for debate and adoption, at first reading, by the full Parliament at its part-session in Strasbourg in July 2002.

¹ See report in *Environmental Policy and Law*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2001) at page 106.

OECD: Partnership for Africa

Ministers from the Member States of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Ministers from Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa, had what they termed "very fruitful discussions" on the New Partnership for Africa's Development Initiative (NEPAD) in Paris on 16 May 2002.

Ministers welcomed as a promising initiative NEPAD's emphasis on a comprehensive and integrated approach to development. This approach, guided by principles of responsibility, African ownership, regional integration, economic freedom, democracy, transparency, good governance, the rule of law, stability, conflict prevention and resolution, human rights, investment in people, the fight against poverty and hunger, and facilitation of market access, is fundamental for development.

Ministers agreed, *inter alia*:

- to enhance African participation in existing OECD global fora and other outreach activities in areas such as investment, trade, good governance, the reinforcement of statistical capacities and sustainable development;
- to exchange views and experience on peer review mechanisms and the requirements necessary for African countries to apply them effectively; and
- to consult in a spirit of mutual trust and partnership on best development practices, aid effectiveness, and on the development benefits of trade, investment, good governance and approaches to sustainable development.

Climate Change: Credits

Danish government officials have stated that power companies based in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA had purchased more than 200,000 tons of credits by the end of 2001, under the Danish carbon emissions trading system. This was the result of the country's CO₂ Quota Act, which went into effect on 1 January 2001. Under the Act, companies using the trading system must notify the Danish government within four weeks of any transaction.

The Danish system will expire on 31 December 2003, but could be extended if no EU-wide system is then in place.

Chemical Weapons Accord

The British government made an attempt at the end of April to revive a global deal to tighten controls on biological and chemical weapons, in spite of the fact that the US has declared the discussions 'dead'.

The British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, has published a compromise that aims to overcome the US hurdle, by water-

ing down key inspection rules opposed by the US biotech industry.

The British proposals are designed to overcome US concern about rival States engaging in 'fishing expeditions' into its biotech research. Any inspections will have to be approved by the UN Secretary-General, to whom evidence would be presented. Under the previous plan, there would have been no limits on investigations, which signatory States will have to comply with.

The British government hopes to revive the talks, which have been going on for five years, before the final dissolution of the negotiating panel in November 2002.

Ozone Layer: International Day

On the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Montreal Protocol, the UN Secretary-General noted that although the scientific assessment carried out this year concluded that some ozone-depleting agents in the atmosphere are declining slowly, others are still on the increase. Scientists predict that the ozone layer will remain particularly vulnerable during the next decade or so, even if all countries comply with the measures put in place by the Montreal Protocol to control and phase out ozone-depleting substances.

The Secretary-General urged all countries to meet their commitments under the Protocol, and in particular the industrialised countries to continue providing the financial and other assistance that will help the developing countries to do so.

US Senate: Caribbean Treaty Approved

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee recently approved the *Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife to the 1983 Convention for Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region* (Cartagena Convention) which is now subject to Senate ratification.

The Protocol calls on each party to establish protected areas and to plan, manage, and enforce measures for these areas. It also requires the parties to undertake national and regional cooperative measures to protect endangered and threatened species of wild flora and fauna.

GEF: New Pledges

In August, 32 developed and developing countries agreed to contribute \$2.92 billion to the Global Environment Facility over the next four years to help developing countries mitigate environmental problems.

The replenishment – the largest ever of the GEF – will continue to finance projects in biodiversity, international waters, replacing ozone-depleting chemicals, and climate change, while providing additional support for the Facility's new mandate to tackle desertification and persistent organic pollutants.

UNEP: Afghanistan Environment

Five teams of Afghani and international scientists and experts will collect samples and examine sites around the country in the first-ever effort to assess how 30 years of conflict have affected Afghanistan's environment.

It is estimated that the country has lost up to 30 per cent of its forests since 1979, so that less than two per cent remains forested. Rangelands, watersheds and agricultural areas are also severely degraded. Afghanistan boasts a rich heritage of biological diversity, but its six protected areas cover less than one per cent of the land.

The field missions will be supplemented by an environmental analysis based on remote sensing using a combination of classic optical and state-of-the-art aperture radar technology.

The final report detailing the findings will be published in December 2002. The report will also recommend projects for improving or remedying environmental threats, improving the institutional framework, increasing Afghanistan's capacity for environmental management and protection, creating jobs in the environmental sector, and improving the implementation of international environmental agreements.

More information is available from UNEP Post-Conflict Assessment Unit at +41-22-9178598 or henrik.slotte@unep.ch.

International Criminal Court

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force on 1 July. The UN Secretary-General said that the entry into force was an historic occasion "which reaffirmed the centrality of the rule of law in international relations".

"It holds the promise of a world in which the perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are prosecuted when individual States are unable or unwilling to bring them to justice. And it gives the world a potential deterrent to future atrocities. I congratulate all the States parties (which stand at 75) on taking the lead in ratifying the Statute, and I appeal to all States that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible", he said. (MJ)

