

Global NGO Document For 1992 (December 1991)

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), to be held in June 1992, provides people's organisations with an opportunity to:

- build linkages with various non-governmental sectors;
- look below and beyond the UNCED process highlighting the serious limitations of the UNCED agenda and focusing on people's organisations' alternative agendas; and
- mobilise people behind a holistic and all encompassing sustainable development action plan based on sharing and caring for nature and each other.

These are precisely the objectives of the Global NGO Documents for 1992 and beyond.

By deciding to build on what indigenous populations, people's organizations and community groups are already doing, the NGO International Steering Committee for 1992 has already taken a clear line to strengthen the NGO movement by helping groups to combine their efforts, rather than simply to produce another new declaration. This will help various NGOs (North, South, East and West, environment and development, urban and rural etc.) to see their common concerns and better understand and appreciate their differences.

The Global NGO documents will be constructed from the "bottom-up" using a process of building upon the broad base of knowledge related to community activities and perspectives as well as on papers and case studies already existing or being prepared by grass-roots organisations, national, regional and international NGOs and networks within the UNCED process and within other relevant popular approaches to environment and development.

The focus will be on models of people's actions -living examples of their experiences. These will include successful examples having implications on policy and cases of people organising themselves and going beyond policies putting sustainable development into practice on their own.

An international team of drafters and special contributors are preparing three documents for the Global NGO Conference to be held in Paris in December 1991:

- a compendium of NGO actions and opinions on environment and development issues;
- a synthesis of the essential character of the NGO approach to the UNCED; and
- a people's action plan outlining the NGO strategy for sustainable development in the 1990s and beyond.

Document 1

"Roots For The Future"

Compendium of People's Organisations' Responses to Environment and Development Challenges

Part I: "Our Diversity Is Our Richness"

The first part of the compendium will trace the emergence of a powerful new common vision from among diverse independent social movements, NGOs, networks, associations and alliances and provide an historical overview of the emergence of newly defined constituencies and new ways of working together.

This part will be written on the basis of the charters, manifestos, declarations, position papers, meetings reports, and activity plans of interested existing and newly created movements dramatizing the richness and strength of our diversity.

It will be divided into four parts: A) ECE region including Europe, North America and the Soviet Union with an additional special chapter on Eastern and Central Europe, B) Africa, C) Asia and D) Latin America.

Part II: "Consultations On People's Participation In Environmentally Sustainable Development"

The second part of the document will contain the reports of many regional and national consultations and some twenty national consultations will be covered.

The reports deal with a wide range of views from a wide range of different perspectives and constituencies represented in the consultations.

Part III: "People's Organisations' Positions On Environment And Development Issues"

The purpose of the third part of the Compendium is to present an overview of the various approaches to specific issues on -- and not -- the official UNCED agenda.

This part will begin with an introduction tracing some of the successes and failures of previous of previous UN initiatives such as the New International Economic Order, Law of the Seas, Decade of Women, International Youth Year, commodity conventions, Summit of the Children, and disarmament conferences.

The remainder of this part will be devoted to a number of issues identified by people's organisations as priorities. in each case there will be a brief mention of the problem/issue; the current state of official negotiations; the position(s) of NGOs on the issues; strategies for NGOs to implement their positions in the real world-- at the community and national levels; and strategies for the individual to influence policy and changes in lifestyles.

Emphasis will be placed on the following three sets of issues:

1. People Defined Issues

- a. Indigenous Peoples
- b. Basic needs
- c. Shifts in Lifestyles
- d. Women and Environment and Development

2. Cross-Sectoral Issues & Money and Institutions

- a. Poverty and Affluence
- b. Environment and Trade
- c. Transfer of Financial Resources
- d. Institutional Mechanisms after UNCED

3. Technological and Environmental Issues

- a. Climate Change
- b. Biodiversity
- c. Biotechnology
- d. Forestry
- e. Transfer of Technology

.....

Document 2

"Justice Between Peoples - Justice Between Generations"

Synthesis of People's Organisations' Responses to Environment and Development Challenges

Part I: "Human Solidarity - The Mother Of All Transformations"

The first part of the synthesis will attempt to draw some conclusions about the essence of the NGO approach, its alternative character, its shortcomings; inherent contradictions (if any) and show how the roots for a better future can be built. There will be two sections: the Southern Perspective and the Northern Perspective.

Part II: "People's Voices"

Based on the reports of the national and regional consultations, this part of the synthesis will emphasize how people, themselves are defining the concept of participation, from the local level upwards, highlighting cases of communities regaining control over their own resources and determining the fates of their own environment and development.

Part III: "Is Anyone Listening?"

This part will be an executive summary of the NGO positions listed in the compendium and based solidly on that foundation, but also making the first attempt to suggest that the overall picture of the alternative approach presents a serious challenge to governments and citizens to rethink and reorganise our relationships with nature and each other.

.....

Document 3 "People's Action Plan For Environment And Development"

This will be the document subject to debate and adoption by more than 800 NGO representatives meeting in Paris in December 1991.

The action plan will be written completely on the basis of the compendium and synthesis above taking its roots from the movement themselves and focusing on what people and people's organisations can do and are surely going to do instead of only emphasizing what governments ought to do. Like the other documents, the central theme will be active citizen involvement in environmentally sound development.

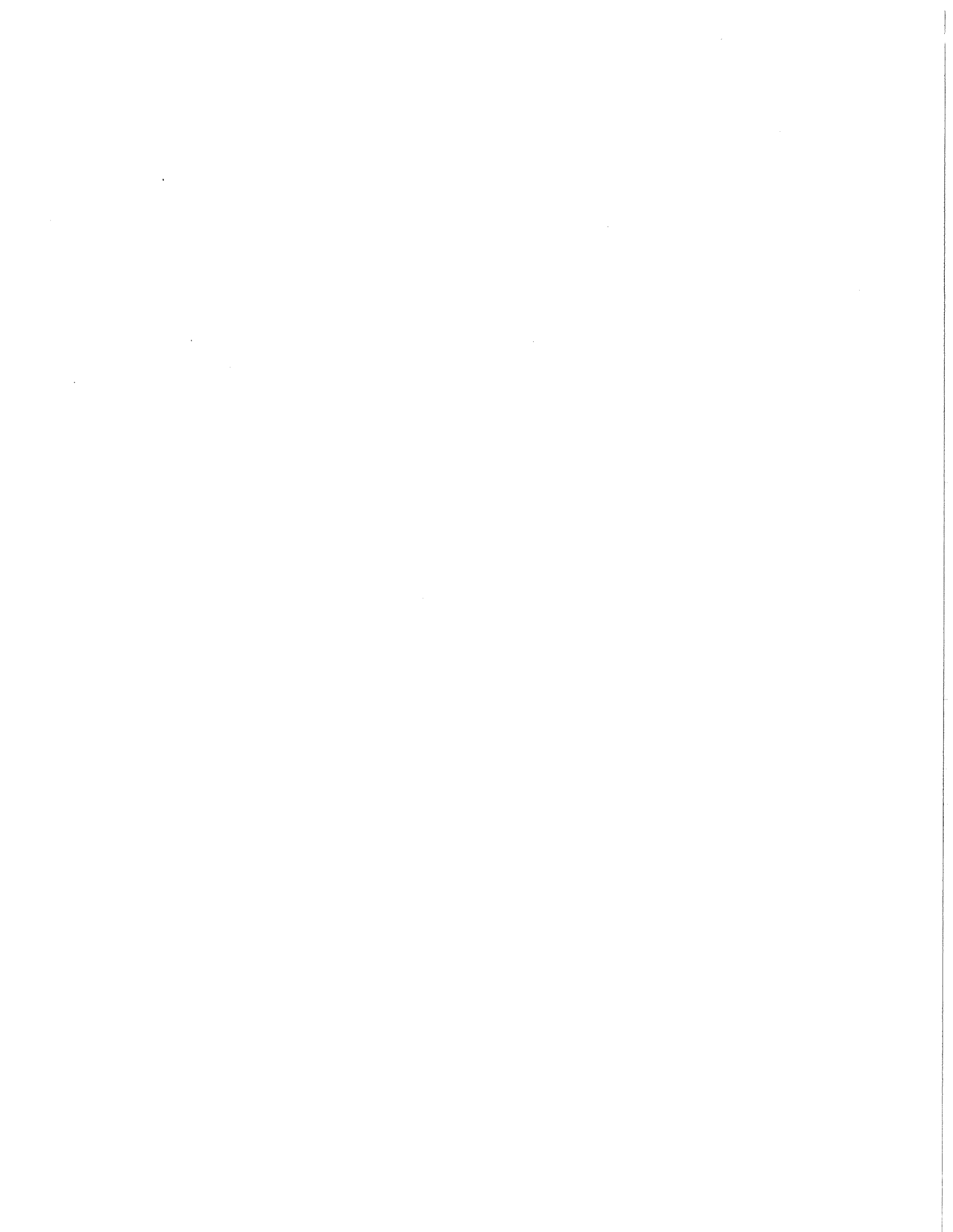
.....

Organisations and individuals wishing to contribute material to the compendium should address themselves to the international drafting committee care of the address below.

All three documents--the compendium, the synthesis and the action plan--will be updated after the Paris Conference, so that many more organisations will have the opportunity contribute to their content and development and so that results can be made available to a wider audience of groups preparing for the UNCED in Rio in 1992.

Contact:

EDRC, 26 Blvd. Louis Schmidtlaan, 1040 Brussels, Belgium Tel. 32-2 7268050, Fax. 32-2 7358895, E-mail geo2:edrc, gn:edrc.



*GREAT LAKES UNITED
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE*

GREAT LAKES RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

24 Bray Hall, SUNY ESF, Syracuse NY 13210, (315) 470-6894, FAX: (315) 470-6779, E-MAIL: JMANNO@SUVM

MEMORANDUM

RE: UNCED and '92 Global Forum

TO: GLU Board

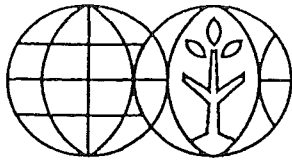
DATE: Monday, January 27, 1992

FROM: Jack Manno

I'm sorry that I wasn't able to give you a more thorough report on our plans for UNCED. We have scheduled a forum as part of the parallel events. The forum will be a discussion of public participation in transboundary environmental agreements: the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement as a case study. The point is to draw from GLUs experience, what we have learned in dealing with an international agreement. As we can see from the IJC discussion at the meeting, this is an ongoing issue. We hope to make it relevant to citizens groups represented at UNCED, even though we are aware that the Canada-US example is not typical.

Here are several documents that you and your groups may be interested in. As I mentioned in Chicago, alot of people are recommending putting energy into the New York preparatory conference rather than Rio. I've included information about the Centre for Our Common Future public forums as well as information about Prepcom 4 and various plans for political activities around the Prepcom. There is also a letter from Barbara Bramble of the National Wildlife Federation giving her point of view on UNCED. I've also included a couple of hype articles as well as commentary on UNCED and Women and someone trying to put together a people's global document.

See you in Windsor, or perhaps in New York....



U.S. CITIZENS NETWORK

ON THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

300 BROADWAY, #39
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94133
415-956-6162; FAX: 415-956-0241
E-MAIL: CITIZENSNET@IGC.ORG

A PROJECT OF THE TIDES FOUNDATION

Extra Extra Extra Extra Extra Extra Extra
Read All About it...

The Citizens Network has opened an office in New York City and retained the services of seasoned activist, Vernice Miller, to assume the role of Coordinator. Vernice will be focussing her energies on logistical needs for the extensive number of events planned for New York during PrepCom. The Network's office is in the Church Center, located across the street from the United Nation's main entrance. You can reach Vernice at:

U.S. Citizens Network, 12th flr.
777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
tel: 212-682-3633

In this Corner... What to Expect at PrepCom 4

Note: The Network, in collaboration with the Canadian Participatory Committee for UNCED and other organizations, will be producing an extensive guide to PrepCom 4 which will be distributed to activists on site in New York. What follows is a brief overview of what to expect from PrepCom and other activities planned for the same period in New York.

From March 2 - April 3, 1992, the United Nations in New York will be the site for the fourth and final Preparatory Committee Meeting (PrepCom 4) for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, otherwise known as the Earth Summit). It will draw approximately 1,500 government delegates and as many as 1,200 observers from Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). With close to 3,000 of the best minds on the planet collected in New York to consider the fate of the planet, one would think that the odds must be high for the meeting to be successful. That remains to be seen. The past two PrepComs were textbook cases of paralyzed negotiations where consensus on most issues remains elusive. More than a year and half has passed and we're still a long way away from making the Rio meeting a success. And so we enter PrepCom 4...

What is a PrepCom?

PrepCom is the term used to describe the negotiation sessions that precede large UN gatherings. The first PrepCom for UNCED was held in Nairobi, Kenya in August of 1990, the second and third PrepComs were held in Geneva, Switzerland in March and August 1991. The Nairobi meeting established the Earth Summit's agenda and the negotiating procedures including the creation of the Working Groups: I -- transboundary air pollution, land resources management, biodiversity and biotechnology; II -- ocean,

coastal, and freshwater resources, toxics and hazardous waste, and human health; III -- legal and institutional issues including the frameworks for both the Earth Charter and Agenda 21. PrepCom 2 was supposed to mark the beginning of actual negotiating, but instead was consumed with a review of the reports prepared for the Working Groups by the UNCED Secretariat's staff (which resulted in numerous calls for revisions). It then fell to PrepCom 3 to be the begin the negotiation process, and, once again, the delegates found it easier to squabble among themselves than to negotiate towards consensus.

Among the squabbles at the last PrepCom was a battle over the degree of access that the NGOs should and could have to the delegates deliberations. According to the UN General Assembly resolution establishing UNCED, NGOs are permitted to have access and participate in only the **formal** meetings of the Conference in its Plenary and Working Group meetings. Smaller, nuts-and-bolts sessions, referred to as **informals**, are open to NGOs only at the discretion of the Chair of the respective working groups, and **informal-informals** are essentially private meetings for delegates exclusively. In the last PrepCom, NGOs were given access to most of the informals until the next to last day when they were barred from those sessions in Working Group I by Chair Bo Kjellen, at the request of the governments of several delegations from both the North and South. It is still unclear if NGOs will be allowed access to these sessions in New York. If they are not admitted to the informals, the ability of NGOs to influence the process will be substantially handicapped because they will be excluded from the sessions in which 90% of the actual negotiating takes place.

At this point, there is no definite schedule for which issues will be debated at what time during the PrepCom.

Who Should Go?

The PrepCom is open to all individuals affiliated with an accredited NGO. If you are not accredited by February 21, then you'll be too late to attend both PrepCom 4 and UNCED. For accreditation information, contact UNCED at B.P. 80, CH-1231 Conches, Switzerland.

Reasons to Come: PrepCom offers the seasoned and the novice NGO activist with a unique opportunity to work with counterparts from both developed and developing countries. Further, it provides activists with an excellent introduction to the vagaries of working the UN system. To ease that process, the UN Non Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) is going to provide inductees to the PrepCom maze with an introduction to the arcana of the UN.

Many other activities are planned to take advantage of the convergence of activists on New York for the PrepCom. A brief description of a few of these events follows.... On February 29, just before the PrepCom begins, the Center for Our Common Future will hold the tenth and final Eco'92 Public Forum which will bring together government negotiators with NGOs from around the world. Participation is open to all. The next weekend, March 5-7, the Highlander Center/National Toxics Campaign, United Church of Christ, the New York Environmental Justice Coalition, and a variety of grassroots environmental justice organizations are sponsoring a Peoples' Forum, which will highlight the environmental and economic development struggles for communities from across the nation and around the world. On March 8, International Women's Day, the World Women's Congress is organizing a demonstration and march that will culminate at UN Plaza with a rally for women around the world. See other enclosures for a complete calendar of events. Also note the letter of invitation to the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee for the Fourth UNCED PrepCom.

Points of Leverage

Because this is the last round of official negotiations before Rio, this is your last, best opportunity to effect the UNCED process and the positions of the U.S.. Organizations that are members of the Citizens Network have identified specific areas where citizen input could provide critical leverage in moving the U.S. in the negotiation process. These include:

Global Climate Change: Although the bulk of the negotiating is taking place under the auspices of the International Negotiating Committee (next round scheduled to take place a week before PrepCom begins), global climate change has loomed prominently in the discussion regarding Agenda 21. To date, the U.S. has refused to consider the European Community's proposal to reduce Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions (from 1988 levels) by 20% by the year 2000. With John Sununu in the White House, there was a widespread belief within the Bush Administration that Global Climate Change was a "chicken-little" fabrication of the environmental community. With Sununu's departure it now remains to be

seen if the Administration's position will change. At the last round of negotiations to develop a convention on climate change, the U.S. continued to refuse to make a commitment on CO2 emissions. Developing countries, meanwhile, have made it clear that their willingness to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and preserve forests (which function as CO2 sinks) is linked to the willingness of industrialized nations to accept and abide by binding limits on their contribution to the problem.

Emerging from the rubble of the last meeting was a Group of 24, comprised of developing countries willing to "consider taking feasible measures to address climate change" without explicit commitments from the North. These nations may join with some of the more progressive industrialized countries in a partial North-South agreement on reducing greenhouse emissions, and in the process isolate intransigent negotiators such as the U.S. even further.

New Institutions: Many developing country NGOs are concerned that the World Bank could emerge from the UNCED process as the anointed savior of the environment in the Third World. They fear that developed country governments will respond to their criticisms of the global economy and inadequate development assistance by making more capital available via the World Bank. While they acknowledge the need for more capital, few NGOs are interested in working with the World Bank because of its consistent disregard for the concerns of communities often directly effected by its loans, and its dismal performance on maintaining environmental quality.

In fact, one of the greatest concerns of many NGOs in both the U.S. and in developing countries is that UNCED will further empower the newly created Global Environmental Facility (GEF) of the World Bank. Since its inception a little over a year ago, environmentalists, human rights activists, and development organizations from around the world already have formed a GEF Network to expose the shortcomings and potential dangers of the GEF as a World Bank program. Activists charge that the GEF focuses much too heavily on issues of concern to the North (biodiversity, oceans, global climate change, and ozone depletion) at the expense of issues of

concern to the South (desertification and north-south export of hazardous wastes). From a U.S. \$ 1.5 billion pilot budget, 70% of the GEF's funds are available only as "add-ons" to existing Bank loans. Thus, access to information on GEF lending is almost as inaccessible as the information for regular Bank loans. This continued secrecy and lack of accountability on the part of an institution that tries to portray itself as a reformed team player, inspires no confidence and considerable fear in most NGO activists in the Third World.

Instead, NGOs propose the creation of a new international institution that promotes environmentally sustainable development and conducts its business in an open and accessible fashion. That means having citizen participation at all levels of the decisionmaking process, from development to implementation, and a democratic process of project approval with equal weight given to developing as well as developed nations. The fallback position is that the GEF should be restructured so as to meet these demands for democratization and access.

Other areas in which there will be serious negotiating include Oceans, Freshwater, and Biological Diversity. Stay tuned...

National Income Accounts: It's time to create a new means of measuring "progress". For decades, if Gross National Product (GNP) went up then it was assumed that all was well and the country was prospering. Often masked by GNP figures is damage done to natural and human resources as a result of this economic activity. For example, industrial production is a key component of the nation's GNP. However, nowhere in the GNP calculation will you find any variables to reflect damage done to forests, rivers, and human health as a direct result of the pollution generated by most modes of industrial production. Thus environmental and health costs that create drags in the present and undermine the future stability of the economy are not factored into the GNP at all. As long as that remains true, we will have a distorted sense of our economic well-being and prosperity. To correct this distortion, the Network proposes that within 5 years the UN adopt a new accounting system which will include full cost pricing for natural resources. It also recommends that quality of life indicators be used to measure national prosperity rather than GNP figures by themselves.

Back Door Access: As discussed on the first page, if the Working Group Chairs are persuaded that the presence of the NGOs is impeding the negotiations (a charge that was made at the last PrepCom in Geneva, and to which NGO representatives responded with calls for the delegates to leave and allow the real experts to do the negotiating), NGOs may be barred from the crucial informal sessions. Although that will be a crippling blow to NGOs' ability to effect the negotiations, many nations, including the U.S., place NGO representatives on national delegations to the PrepComs. For the last two PrepComs, the majority of the U.S. NGO slots have been filled with Network members. Although they draw the line at passing along state secrets, NGOs on the delegations and "inside" the process regularly confer with their colleagues on the "outside" so that there is a steady flow of information regarding the tenor of the negotiations. Ah, the intrigue...

Negotiating Blocs

It is widely acknowledged that the U.S. is a bloc in its own right. With its economic resources, political stature, and as a major contributor to the globe's ecological and economic problems, the U.S. can effectively block or marginalize any proposal that it finds offensive. However, other blocs do function within the UN. Although their constituent strength varies issue by issue, the other principal blocs include the countries within the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which includes the 12 members of the European Community with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Great Britain, and the U.S. (when it is in a cooperative mood), and the Group of 77 (G-77) The G-77, otherwise referred to as the nonaligned movement, refers to practically every nation not included in the OECD or the former Warsaw Pact (and as such now has expanded to well over 100 in number). Most of the former satellites of the now defunct U.S.S.R. are expected to join the European Community at some point. Thus the G-77 represents principally the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and has a rotating chairmanship, currently held by Edward Kufour, Ghana's Ambassador to the UN.

Press At PrepCom

An NGO press center will be in operation for the duration of the PrepCom. Organized through Island Press, and located in the Dag Hammarskjold Lounge within the Church Center located at 777 UN Plaza, the Press Center will be the site for daily press and NGO briefings on the PrepCom negotiations. Island Press will also make available to the press and members of the Network, a daily written summary of the PrepCom proceedings. (Island Press and the Network are also collaborating on a series of editorial board briefings which will be held between now and the start of PrepCom.)

For Further Information: If you want to keep abreast of what is happening during the intersessional period before PrepCom begins and help plan the "outside" strategy, contact Johanna Bernstein of the Canadian Participatory Committee for UNCED at (613) 238-3811. If you are interested in working on the events planned in New York during PrepCom, contact Kristin Dawkins of the Fair Trade Campaign at (612) 379-5980 or Marjorie Moore at (212) 481-4355. For those Network members interested in plotting "inside" strategy and in developing partnerships with developing country NGOs, contact Michael McCoy of the Center for Citizen Advocacy at (212) 663-9238.

For additional general information regarding PrepCom, contact the Network's office in San Francisco.

/* Written 10:58 am Oct 14, 1991 by citizensnet in cdp:en.unced.news */

WOMEN

UNCED AVIODS TOUGH ISSUES THAT WOMEN'S CONGRESS TACKLES

Women are half the world's population, yet most often have virtually no say in the environment and development policies that affect them, their families and the survival of the planet. This has been true ever since the first UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972--the foundation for most environmental policy of the last 20 years--and it is still true today.

Even now women are nearly invisible in the national delegations preparing for UNCED. Some countries, including the U.S., have appointed women to their delegations as observers, and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also are represented by women. But generally they participate as technical experts and not as activists concerned with the political issues of gender equity.

This mirrors the situation of NGOs and governments worldwide. Although women are the vast majority of grassroots activists, few are in positions of power--even in environmental organizations--setting priorities and making decisions on issues to be tackled nationally and internationally.

Last October, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), co-chaired by Network member Bella Abzug, invited 55 women from 32 countries to a meeting in New York where they formed an International Policy Action Committee (IPAC). Upon returning home, these women immediately initiated national and international campaigns to give women a significant say in preparations for the Earth Summit, in UNCED itself and in the parallel meetings in Brazil. This August IPAC members organized at PrepCom 3 in Geneva to get a resolution passed stipulating that "women's critical economic, social and environmental contributions" be considered at UNCED.

The IPAC Steering Committee also has taken an active role in developing the form and substance of the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, November 8-12 in Miami, Florida.

The five-day Congress will be conducted as a Tribunal, with distinguished women judges--from Guyana, Kenya, Australia, Sweden, and India--hearing testimony about the successes and failures of women's battles against ecological and economic devastation.

Some testimony relates directly to UNCED, with sessions devoted to the Earth Charter and the transfer of appropriate technologies. But many witnesses will tackle tough issues UNCED is skirting, such as family planning and sexual politics; poverty, maldevelopment and the misallocation of resources; bioengineering and its consequences for women; war and peace.

Participants will act as jurors. They will take evidence from the Tribunal, along with their own experience, to workshops where they will develop recommendations and actions for a healthy planet. The resulting Women's Action Agenda will be presented to UNCED Secretary-General Maurice Strong and a panel of women political leaders at the final session of the Congress. It then goes to UN policy bodies and governments for worldwide action.

Contact: World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, c/o WEDO, 845 Third Avenue, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10017; phone: 212-759-7982; fax: 212-759-8647.

Another forum being held to discuss women in development and environment is scheduled for Nov. 21-24 in Washington, DC. Learning Together/Working Together: A South-North Dialogue, sponsored by the Association for Women in Development, will examine women's political, economic, educational and cultural empowerment, and will have a focus session on women's participation in UNCED. Please contact the conference office at 913-532-5575 for details.

"The opportunity of UNCED is not seeing women as victims, but as part of the solution, intellectually, emotionally, and politically. In most areas, early movements have started through women's initiatives. This is the most important reason why women need to be on the agenda at UNCED."

- Vandana Shiva, Third World Network

WRITE TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN UNCED

The U.S. played a leading role in co-sponsoring the PrepCom decision in August urging that "women should be recognized as active participants" in combating environmental degradation and in managing ecosystems. Now is the time for U.S. action on this resolution. Write President Bush urging the U.S. to live up to its commitment. Ask for:

1. Equal representation of women and men on the US delegation to UNCED.
2. Active promotion of women's participation in decision-making and management, not only at UNCED but at all levels of government, from the local to the international.
3. Human and material resources to promote women's participation in UNCED activities.
4. Specific actions in Agenda 21 (the proposed plan for sustainable development) that will benefit women.

President Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Last Chance to save the Earth

Governments and citizen groups alike are preparing for UNCED or Earth Summit '92 at a time when the world faces unprecedented ecological and developmental crises. To save Earth and thus humanity, North and South must reach an agreement to resolve global environment problems. But that is possible only if there is simultaneously a North-South agreement on international economic issues.

Martin Khor Kok Peng

EARTH SUMMIT '92 is finally getting on the road. The UN Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Brazil in June 1992, is spurring governments and citizen groups alike to focus on a wide range of issues relating to the world environment crisis and the survival of Earth and humanity.

But finding solutions to pressing problems from floods and river pollution at national level to deforestation and climate change at global level is proving much more difficult than first meets the eye.

As preparations slowly build up for UNCED, it is becoming increasingly clear that technological fix-it solutions are not enough. Indeed they are not even of central importance to Earth Summit's success nor to the environment crisis' solution.

Instead, social, developmental and political issues will take centre stage. For the main issues emerging in the ecological debates revolve around the control, distribution and use (or abuse) of the world's increasingly scarce natural resources.

Or else the discussions are focusing on which countries are primarily responsible for polluting the world and causing climatic changes such as the Greenhouse Effect or ozone loss; and thus where the burden of adjustment should be borne.

There is growing public interest world wide on the actual Earth Summit, where over a hundred heads of governments will gather and 20,000 people from the non-governmental sectors will hold alternative conferences in Rio de Janeiro. But what is going to be discussed or achieved at this mammoth event is being determined now, in negotiations between governments.

Government delegates are meeting in Preparatory Committee (Prepcom) sessions that are meant to produce agreements, programmes and policies to be adopted at the Earth Summit.

The second Prepcom session, held over three weeks in March-April in Geneva, discussed a wide range of issues including climate change, the trade in toxic products and wastes, deforestation, biodiversity and biotechnology.

Special sessions were also held to debate general (or 'cross-sectoral') issues such as the link between poverty and environment, the transfer of environmental technology to the Third World, and the laws and institutional mechanisms that should be established to finance and implement global environmental decisions.

Many Third World delegates are complaining that the UNCED agenda has been too dominated by Northern interests, that the North is only interested in the physical and environmental aspects of the crisis, whilst neglecting the Third World's need for development.

There is the fear that focusing on technical aspects of ecological problems without putting them in the context of unequal North-South economic relations would lead to another form of domination over the Third World. The South could be asked to stop or slow down its development whilst the North, already enjoying high living standards, would continue its way of life with only minimal inconveniences from technological adjustment.

Already suffering the social effects of financial structural adjustment, the South may now be forced to bear the brunt of new economic adjustment dictated by global ecological imperatives. A

number of Third World countries are resisting this possibility within UNCED.

Ambassador Kofi Awoonor of Ghana, speaking as current chairman of the Group of 77 developing countries, linked environmental degradation to global economic imbalances and the transfer of resources from South to North caused by low commodity prices. Unless the North is willing to redress such economic imbalances, the South would find it difficult to cooperate to solve global environmental problems, he indicated in a powerful speech at the April Prepcom meeting.

With only a year before Earth Summit, UNCED stands on the crossroads between abject failure and glorious success.

Failure would be the result, if the North were to insist on only looking towards technological solutions, such as improving environmental technology, reducing forest loss or cutting CFC production, without agreeing to drastically change its resource-sapping, high consumption and wasteful lifestyle; or to correct global economic imbalances. The South would then be reluctant to change national policies towards more ecological forms of development.

On the other hand, UNCED offers the opportunity for the revival of international cooperation on a comprehensive scale. The South could agree to national adjustments favourable to the global ecology, such as a halt to destroying tropical forests, the conservation of biodiversity and minimising the use or production of harmful substances.

In exchange the North must also agree to an even more dramatic restructuring of its economies, cutting down on overproduction and consumption. It could agree to facilitate the South's adjustment through North-South transfers in forms such as higher prices for Third World commodities, debt reduction and aid or compensation to finance the transition from ecologically destructive to ecologically sound development.

In other words, an effective North-South agreement on global environment requires genuine North-South cooperation on international economics.

At present, the chances for such a bargain do not appear bright. It is more likely that the governments will keep on haggling for years to come, whilst the global environment continues to be degraded and destroyed. The problems of humanity appear too complex and deeply entrenched for Earth to be saved.

This is where the peoples' movements, the NGOs and individual environmentally-conscious scientists can play a role. After all, these were the groups and individuals that have alerted the governments to the ecological crisis, and thus responsible for the staging of Earth Summit.

The voices of ordinary citizens around the world - the victims of environmental degradation, the sufferers of development gone wrong, the witnesses to Earth's and humanity's possible death throes - have to loudly and clearly carry through the thick mist of bureaucratic and political wrangling, to reach the decision-makers, telling them to stop the madness of unsustainable and unequal growth, to cooperate in a new spirit of genuine internationalism, redress the world's economic imbalances, change national development systems, and thus grasp this almost last chance to save the Earth.



By Curtis Moore

The United States has distinguished itself as the world's leading environmental wrecking crew, delaying or shattering agreement on subjects from Antarctic protection to global warming.

The Swedes know about it. So do the Germans, the Japanese, the Brazilians—even those on the tiny island nation of Cyprus. But in the United States, the Earth Summit is practically a state secret.

No matter that the summit—officially, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, convening in June in Rio de Janeiro—will likely be a watershed event: history's largest gathering of presidents, prime ministers, and other heads of state. Or that it may shape thinking and action for decades to come. In America,

where environmentalism was born, the Earth Summit goes unnoticed.

In one sense, this isn't surprising. The United States has distinguished itself as the world's leading environmental wrecking crew, delaying or shattering agreement on subjects from global warming to Antarctic protection.

Not so elsewhere:

- In Germany, after undertaking a study of global threats to the planet, the parliament published a 1,678-page report that bulges with graphs, charts, and data. Most important, it commits the nation to slashing pollutants that cause global warming by nearly a third within twenty years.

- Underdeveloped nations like Brazil have curbed deforestation and launched programs to plant millions of trees.

- To spur business to develop clean technologies, Sweden enacted sweeping environmental taxes on pollutants that cause smog, acid rain, and global warming.

- Japan launched "New Earth 21"—286 governmental initiatives to arrest global warming.

- Alarmed by the possibility of coastal flooding from global warming, the Netherlands has already begun curbing pollution. "We have no choice but to act now," the government declared.

These and hundreds of actions by the world's governments are pointed toward adopting international agreements in Rio on at least two subjects—climatic change and biodiversity—and maybe a third on forests. The Rio Conference is being held on the twentieth anniversary of the Stockholm Conference, which galvanized industrial nations and produced two decades of environmental improvement. Yet those improvements failed to keep pace with deterioration.

Three years ago, for example, the ozone destruction caused by Freons and other chemicals was thought limited to high altitudes and cold regions—mainly, an ozone hole over Antarctica as large as North America and as high as Mt. Everest. Elsewhere, depletion was measured in a few percent.

Earth Summit: The World Gears Up

But today, that global percentage has roughly doubled, and ozone losses at the South Pole are reaching ground level, while "holes" have been detected in the Arctic—all of which suggests that scientists underestimated the speed and extent to which ozone can be destroyed.

News on the global warming front isn't good either. Three years ago, concern over the Greenhouse Effect seemed to crest when the scorching droughts of 1988 parched the world's breadbaskets from the Ukraine to the Dakotas. Standing trees in the American West contained less moisture than kiln-dried timber in lumberyards, causing forest fires to rage throughout North America.

Some scientists argued that 1988 was a temporary phenomenon—a natural variation in earth's weather. Yet 1989 and 1990, while cooler, still entered the record books—and 1991 seems likely to do the same.

Recent scientific expeditions confirm that from 1978 to 1987, the arctic ice sheet shrank by 2 to 3 percent, while Alaska's permafrost warmed by a half-degree Centigrade—both evidence of a warming trend. Since ocean temperatures also are up, the seas continue to spawn some of history's worst hurricanes. The strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded hit North America, and for the first time one struck Central America. India's worst monsoons flooded the subcontinent.

Scientists know that natural reactions often are neither smooth nor linear. Heated past a critical point, water turns to steam, not hotter water. Avalanches topple all at once, not in gradual slides. Lightning suddenly sunder the air when a threshold is crossed.

A similar event explains the Antarctic ozone hole. When the bone-chilling cold and the witches brew of manmade chemicals reach a critical point—a threshold—a runaway reaction that is roughly the chemical equivalent of a thermonuclear explosion destroys virtually all of the ozone at high altitudes in a matter of days.

The ozone hole has taught scientists a lesson in humility. Chastened by their newfound ignorance, they have begun warming with increasing stridency that life as we know it—perhaps even life itself—is at risk.

Other nations have taken heed, which accounts for their preparations for the Earth Summit. But George Bush continues to stubbornly demand study instead of action—and other nations are increasingly unhappy about it.

"By action, [Great Britain] alone will not even dent the problem," said British Prime Minister John Major in criticizing Bush's inaction. "We produce only 3 percent of the world's [carbon dioxide]. The United States accounts for 23 percent."

Major, like other leaders, knows that since the U.S. is the world's biggest polluter, other nations must sleep in the bed George Bush makes. These days, they aren't getting a good night's sleep.

Curtis Moore is an environmental writer and analyst.

.....
 ☉ For information about programs on the environment, see View More About It on page 50.