

Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation

Ramsey Wright Building 25 Harbord Street Toronto 181 Ontario Phone 928-7156

UNITED NATIONS' CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Notes for
A Criticism
of the
United Nations Action Plan

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Joanna Hayda.

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The Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation is a national non-profit coalition of scientists, lawyers and citizens dedicated to the improvement of environmental quality through implementation of legal remedies and development of reforms in the law.

The Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation submits that the UN Conference on the Human Environment has undertaken far too broad a range of problems for its consideration. To consider all of those elements of the human environment which include social, economic, cultural, political and physical ramifications in the course of one conference is a gargantuan task.

As a result, the UN "Action Plan" puts before the participating nations, a document which has lost its motivational impact through too much generalization, too wide a focus, and too little "action".

Every page bears innumerable references to: "recommendations", "suggestions", "cooperation" and "agreement", but nowhere is there a categorical commitment to attack the problems of pollution and effectively plan for conservation of the environment. There is a basic need at Stockholm conference for honest communication and concrete commitment to the resolution of environmental issues by the member nations. The time for diplomacy and gentle talk is past.

The Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation does agree in principle with the following five, of the many UN preparatory committee recommendations:

1. A world wide monitor system for air, water, land and noise pollution.
2. Exchange of information and research data between member nations.
3. Agreement on international standards and policies for prevention and control of pollution.
4. Research in (a) ecological processes (b) prevention of pollution (c) pollution consequences to health (d) influences on climate and weather (e) psychological, social and economic stresses caused by pollution.
5. Education of the people in Man and his Relationship to the Environment.

However, two main deficiencies appear in the presentation of these points in the "Action Plan".

The UN's declaration on the Human Environment states that those who are affected by pollution should more effectively participate in the decisions regarding control and prevention. Yet participating in the Stockholm conference are governmental committees and in Canada's case the only apparent effort to involve the public are these hastily arranged public hearings.

It is hoped that public hearings, which have been infrequent gestures of participation offered the private citizen in Canada, will become the rule rather than the exception in Canadian environmental planning, and that such participation will be advocated by Canada at Stockholm.

The second main deficiency is the lack of concrete proposals to control the phenomenon of pollution.

Where is the draft legislation and regulations which will become binding conventions, and that will structure a body for implementation and enforcement of such laws?

Canada, in the spirit of its recent cooperative effort with the U.S. should put forward as its contribution to the Stockholm conference draft laws that would, at the conference, not ten years from now, be studied and accepted. Draft international conventions are not the only solution to environmental problems but they serve to test the sincerity of member nations to take effective action rather than to simply attend international conferences and agree in principle.

There are needed on a global scale, as well as in Canada, a set of acceptable standards for purity of water, air and soil. These should include specific and comprehensive references to maximums of man-made elements, biocides, radiation and all other potentially harmful pollution sources. They must be set by law lower than they are at present.

The reason for international standards set by law is that even within national governments there are too many branches to enable a co-ordinated approach to combat or even legislate effectively against pollution. There is need for one international neutral authority to enforce these international standards. The reason for a legal centralized global authority, is the need to overcome inefficient and ineffective pollution control that is split by sovereign and artificial geographic boundaries.