

EDITORIAL

The eleventh session of the UNEP Governing Council is now behind us. The meeting was more precise than that of last year and although there were some tough discussions, it was generally held to be both business-like and effective. In this issue you will find a summary of papers distributed in advance, and the actual report of the meeting is now in print for the next issue.

Pollution of the atmospheric layers is causing more and more concern. As usual, only if damage is visible to everyone, do the politicians start running behind, without much hope of catching up.

And we have to admit that scientists too are lagging behind and at variance. It is still argued by some that with regard to such pollution there is still insufficient evidence to warrant high prevention costs and industrial restrictions. One side says that it is high time for action while the other prefers to wait for more proof.

If the politicians wait until the scientists are unanimous, the damage could be irreparable. No-one can force a state to choose one side or the other in the scientific debate and in this connection it is interesting to note the reaction of the US delegation at the recent Geneva Conference of the Executive Body for the Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution. The US has often stated that it feels that there is not enough evidence to prove that sulphur emissions are responsible for acid rain. However, it was reported in the national press that the US delegation would join in any consensus decision on first steps to implement the Convention reached by the majority. Following a week-long meeting, the delegation then finally declared — the statement will be printed in the next issue with a report of the meeting — that it could not join in the consensus. It was said that the Administration was furious about the leak and that the delegation, as a result, received last-minute instructions. Understandably, the Canadian delegation expressed its “deep disappointment” at the US action.

Some special developments are in the air concerning Antarctica. Representatives of the Antarctic Treaty Parties met in Wellington, New Zealand, in January 1983 to continue discussions on a draft treaty for mineral resources and this meeting is to be followed by another one in Bonn next month.

We are not alone in criticizing that many such meetings are held behind closed doors and such drafts are kept strictly confidential. As in earlier cases, we feel this to be counter-productive and intend, therefore, to print in the next issue the personal report of the Chairman on the Wellington meeting together with the draft treaty, received too late for publication this time. We shall also reprint the resolution passed by the non-aligned nations in New Delhi, which stated that Antarctica “should be accessible to all nations” and agreed to push the UN, at the next General Assembly “to undertake a comprehensive study on Antarctica”. It is too early at this stage to speculate on the outcome of such a move, but it could fundamentally affect some aspects of international law. □

— Wolfgang R. Steury —