EDITORIAL

While this issue was being prepared for the press, the world was discussing the aftermath of the accident in the Chernobyl nuclear reactor.

Leaving aside the scientific aspects of the disaster (upon which we are not qualified to comment), it would appear that there is very strong evidence to suggest that the regulatory and contingency response measures were totally inadequate. Be that as it may, one thing would appear to be amply demonstrated — that, even though exchange of information and consultation between States in cases where the threat of environmental damage exists has become a widespread practice, no reliance can be placed on that practice being observed in cases touching upon vital national interests in the absence of a binding international convention on the subject, and perhaps (in cases like Chernobyl, at least) not even then.

Reaction to the effects of a nuclear accident is pre-eminently an area in which clear thinking is called for. It is also one in which it is essential that public opinion is fully informed. Therefore, the response of the news media and, indeed, of the general public, in the Chernobyl case can only be regarded as regrettable and unhelpful. International collaboration to mitigate the results of a catastrophe of this magnitude is not well-served by newspaper and television reports which dwell only upon the good news that the serious harm has been caused in some other country.

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In addition to the general financial crisis now affecting the United Nations, the specific one concerning UNESCO is now fully evident. Although the latter still maintains that its scientific projects — in particular those in the field of the environment and marine resources — are not being impaired, it is clear that the UN restrictions will apply to all spheres of activity, so that each project will inevitably be affected. A percentage across-the-board cut will equally affect UNEP insofar as its funds are drawn from the general UN budget.

It is, therefore, perhaps fortunate that UNEP had already undertaken an internal review of its programme before the effects of the cuts were likely to be known. Certainly, to some extent this review pre-empts any recommendations which may come from the World Commission on Environment and Development. It would appear, however, that UNEP has carried out a very honest self-examination and is ready to make several far-reaching changes to its structure.

A mark of the honesty of the review was that UNEP did not try to hide its own shortcomings nor its experience of collaboration with other components of the UN. The review makes it abundantly clear that UNEP found it received better value from organizations including non-governmental organizations outside the UN system.

May 1986

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors,

In my paper on "The Uniform Transboundary Pollution Reciprocal Access Act" I stated that "in Europe only the Netherlands *formally* grant equal access to its courts and tribunals to citizens of all nations". To clarify this point let me add that most European Stats grant equal access *as a matter of course.* As stated in the article, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland subscribe among themselves to the equal access principle formally through the Nordic Convention on the Protection of the Environment.

In 1975, OECD surveyed equal access and found that the countries causing difficulties were the Federal Republic of Germany, France and Canada. Since then, France granted equal access (Strasbourg Administrative Court).

The principle evidently has a way to go before being fully accepted in both Europe and North America.

Yours sincerely,

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