

EDITORIAL

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) has received many requests and proposals for action, for example in the course of the series of Public Hearings it has held in the different regions. Nevertheless, with regard to the area of environmental law, there is the impression that what has, or is being done, is of a very minor nature only and very conservative. This was also the case concerning the work of the group of legal experts called by the secretariat of the Commission, up until its last session. So Commissioners were very happy that Judge Cohen asked for a new direction in this area in his address to the plenary session of the Commission, meeting in Ottawa (see page 106).

Simultaneously, but independently of one another, members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Policy, Law and Administration (CEPLA), have been working on their own submission to the WCED, in an endeavour to push for action. The result (see page 90) may appear in some aspects to be too demanding, although a positive first reaction came from the WCED law group immediately following its presentation, which led the legal experts there to incorporate some of the points made into their own report.

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Those participating at the UN Special Session on Africa were disappointed that events had not gone as hoped for (see page 98), and that a compromise could only be found after the session should officially have been closed. It is generally accepted that this Continent's environment is so important, that its economy and development can only be improved if the problems of environmental degradation are dealt with at the same time. We were happy to realize during the session that this message had got through.

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Since the creation of UNEP, following the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment, we have reported continually, and we like to think more extensively than other publications, on UNEP's activities and recommendations. Certainly, we have been critical at times, while pointing out the positive aspects of the work UNEP has been doing. The self-evaluation UNEP has recently undertaken (see page 104), is to be praised and a number, if not all weaknesses, have been laid bare. The organization has stated that it will make the necessary changes.

The evaluation has been completed during the final fact-finding phase of the WCED, so that the Commission will probably no longer be in a position to make particular proposals on the infrastructure of UNEP. Now that these new proposals will have to be tested, it is clear that UNEP has cleverly nipped any forthcoming criticism, in the bud.

IUCN/CEPLA has also been pushing for a stronger place for environmental policy at UN Headquarters. As UNEP is a programme, and has not been operational but has had a purely catalytic function up until now, it cannot judge on what Member States of the UN are doing or are failing to do. A body of the UN where the States have to report regularly could do more for implementation and this would indirectly make UNEP stronger and have a more positive effect on the Programme.

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With reference to our last editorial, it can now be seen that the Chernobyl accident has strengthened the position of the IAEA. For example, they have no competence for the safety of installations or the relevant inspections, but there is now movement in this area. Several conferences will be held in Vienna this Summer and work is progressing on two new international conventions concerning an early-warning system and emergency aid for accidents with transboundary consequences. □

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