

EDITORIAL

Readers will immediately recognize that this issue is essentially "UNEP's own". The 15th session of the Governing Council was, in the words of Mostafa Tolba, "the best ever", and with 103 countries present (only 58 are normally members of the GC), the best attended so far. As the UNEP GC is certainly the most important intergovernmental forum concerning environmental matters, we were persuaded that we were justified in postponing other material until next time, in order to accommodate so much information now.

Many important decisions were taken, which are too numerous to be repeated here and readers are referred to the report on page 86 and the decisions from 118 on. But perhaps one of the most interesting developments is that concerning the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (see page 128).

Many people, both within and outside the UN system look to this 1992 meeting as a major event which may set the long-term priorities for the environmental efforts of the UN system and NGOs. It may also institute a major alignment in the collaboration between the elements of the UN system, as well as between the UN system and NGOs, on the most important environmental issues.

Developments confirmed the feeling of the lawyers present: formerly UNEP had given the impression of being somewhat afraid of legal activities and these were, as a result, rather neglected. Now the pendulum has swung in the other direction and lawyers are afraid of being given the biggest load of GC proposals!

The attendance of 44 Ministers in the Council's session reflected the growth in prominence of environmental concerns and their place on the political agenda. Indeed, environment rose so high on the political agenda in the Netherlands that a discussion on some of the financial aspects of the long-term environmental policy plan in that country caused the fall of the Government — the first time in Europe that a Government has fallen because of an environmental matter. We felt that this warranted a cover photo! (See also in this connection, speech of Mr. Nijpels on page 90)

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On 22 May, Australia stated that it would not sign the Antarctic Minerals Convention (see Environmental Policy and Law (1988) at page 115), as it "is dedicated to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and in that context our strong commitment is that no mining at all — including oil drilling — should take place in and around the continent". Instead, it will pursue the "urgent negotiation of a comprehensive environmental protection convention within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System". In that context, Australia will explore the prospects for the establishment of an "Antarctic Wilderness Park".

During Prime Minister Hawke's visit to Europe, he encouraged international support for a comprehensive environmental regime for Antarctica. In mid-June, Mr. Hawke and French Prime Minister Rocard issued a joint statement on the need to ensure complete protection of the Antarctic Environment and more countries are expected to follow this lead. Nevertheless, it is surprising how countries that have taken part in cumbersome negotiations over a period of years can suddenly change their position. We shall report on further developments.

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— Wolfgang R. Steiner —