

EDITORIAL

1999 started with a number of important events, although we have not yet covered everything from the end of last year (for example, the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly: the first part finished in mid-December, and a report is scheduled for the next issue).

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Last month saw three important meetings: On 2 January, UNEP's International Working Group of Legal Experts met in New Delhi, to finish the study on dispute avoidance and dispute settlement in international environmental law. The paper was subsequently presented as document GC.20/Inf.16, to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme. On 25 January, the second session of the International Negotiating Committee (INC.2) for an International Legally Binding Instrument for Implementing Action on Certain Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) commenced in Nairobi, just one week before the UNEP Governing Council. Reports on all three meetings are planned for the next issue.

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The very substantial documentation for the Governing Council arrived quite late, thus preventing any preliminary report in this issue. There were over 40 GC papers and 30 Information papers, most with many pages, in addition to those papers produced during the conference.

However, as I do not want to anticipate our report in the next issue, I want to limit myself to just one remark on the Council: there was not a delegate at the Meeting who was not aware of a change in the atmosphere, and the energetic and enthusiastic attempt of Executive Director Klaus Töpfer to reform UNEP. This was reflected in the results on the budget and the Task Force (see also EPL Vol. 28 at page 214). All of which meant that delegates departed from Nairobi with a new enthusiasm.

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At the time of writing, the Ad-Hoc Intersessional Working Groups for the preparation of the Seventh Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) are beginning their work for the April meeting of the Commission.

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At the end of this month, the Extraordinary Conference of the Parties on Biosafety will be meeting in Cartagena to finalise and adopt the biosafety protocol to the UN Biodiversity Convention, aimed at reducing the risk of uncontrolled releases of Living Modified Organisms into the environment. Following two-and-a-half years of difficult negotiations, important issues still remain to be resolved. There is much opposition from industry and US business groups, for example, have opposed the proposed protocol which they argue will impose onerous and unnecessary controls on trade in LMOs. We shall report in the next issue.

- Wolfgang R. Steiner -

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