

# EDITORIAL

*Although the situation is serious, we are happy to report that the Kosovo war did not lead to an environmental catastrophe in the Balkans and ecological disaster in the Danube. The joint UNEP/Habitat Task Force, which studied the impact of the conflict on the environment, noted that some of the environmental damage evident in certain areas was a follow-on from the mistakes and omissions made by the local authorities before the war started. Nevertheless, Chairman Pekka Haavisto said that there is an urgent need to include environmental action as part of humanitarian assistance to the area.*

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*For quite a while now, newspapers, journals and international conferences have been debating what exactly falls under the term "sustainable development" and what does not. We do not think that this is going to lead anywhere, for everyone has enough perception to understand what sustainability is. This is obviously also the judgement in some drafting fora, where the majority have decided not to lay down a general definition. We have the feeling that even specific definitions, for example, of the term "sustainable traffic," will, in the long term, not contribute much to the discussion.*

*This was evident at the recently concluded twenty-second special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action (see page 256). The Conference was reminded that although some progress had been made, "sustainable development" in any meaning of the term, will only be possible for Small Island Developing States and other developing countries if accompanied by increased resource mobilisation and financing.*

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*The idea of using "terminator" technologies designed to prevent germination of harvested grain as seed, thereby blocking farmers in developing countries from saving their own seed for re-sowing, has engendered strong opposition from both NGO and official sources. The recent decision by the US Monsanto Corporation not to use such technology has therefore been hailed as a major victory and a warning to other powerful corporations to work with, rather than against those opposed to certain technologies, so that a result can be achieved which is acceptable to all.*

*In an open letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, the Corporation's CEO now "recognises that biotechnology, like any new technology, raises issues that must be addressed" and agrees "that it is better to listen and to seek common ground wherever it is available" with environmental groups and those opposed to genetically modified crops. Better late than never.*

*- Wolfgang R. Steyer -*

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