

# EDITORIAL

*The recent session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (see page 73) was judged by many as being not only the most successful ever vis-à-vis promised financial resources, but also a personal success for Executive Director Klaus Töpfer. Widespread appreciation was voiced over the way he has led the organisation in the past years and his achievement in pushing UNEP up the priority pole. It is good that he will have the opportunity to continue.*

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*If nominations are a way of gauging the direction of policy, then the nomination of Under-Secretary of State John Bolton as President Bush's choice to be US Ambassador to the United Nations tells us many things. This is a nominee who has a history of questioning the relevance of the UN, and who once said that if its building lost 10 of its 38 storeys, "it would not make much difference". On the other hand, a conservative spokesman has maintained that it is a "huge step in the right direction in terms of fundamentally reforming the United Nations". So, is it just a question of viewpoint? One could, of course, argue that national decisions taken by a sovereign nation are not our business. But when that nation sees itself as the only superpower, then we have to take notice.*

*Observers have also seen a change in previous policy concerning the priority rating of the EPA, in the proposed appointment of Stephen Johnson as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Not because of the personal and intellectual qualities of the nominee, but because it is certain that an insider will not be given the long-desired cabinet rank.*

*Another controversial policy change is the plan to open a 1.5 million-acre area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration, with the failure by opponents in the Senate to overturn a proposal that would allow drilling. President Bush claims that the US needs "to open up new areas to environmentally responsible exploration for oil and natural gas" (and to help balance the budget). The Republican Senator for Alaska has insisted for 20 years that the area is "not environmentally sensitive" and mining is now necessary for energy independence.*

*The relevant environmental impact statement noted that "it is the most biologically productive part of the Arctic Refuge for wildlife and is the centre of wildlife activity."*

*What can the study below actually change, if we all continue to act in the so-called national interest?*

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*The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) began releasing its findings today. Its key synthesis report, entitled "Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Being", makes grim reading. The project, which involves some 1,500 experts from across the world, is a partnership among international organisations. We shall report on the findings in the coming months.*

30 March 2005

*- Wolfgang R. S. -*