

EDITORIAL

As we write this editorial, the Copenhagen Climate Summit has just begun. We are inundated by a flood of paper and the number of planned side events suggests that many useful offerings will not be well attended unless they appear to be of great political importance or to provide attendees with very good food and drink. Given the attendance figures, however, we are glad that there will be many gatherings to inform and fill the time of those registered participants who are not lucky enough to win a seat in the negotiation room.

Within those negotiations, we are optimistic that the small group of decision makers will be successful in coming to some final conclusions. Recognising that such an outcome will likely not be a treaty or a draft treaty, it is important that the negotiators can agree on principles and objectives to guide the future process of elaborating a legally binding text.

This is especially important, since we are shocked to hear that the oceans have been warmer than ever and UNEP reports that the tempo of climate warming is beyond expected scenarios.

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In a previous editorial, we reported on the rebuilding of the UN Headquarters in New York. We hope that this process will avoid the recently reported planting of listening devices and alleged espionage at the UN Office in Geneva.

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Our thinking processes are stimulated by a recent query and its response: When a question arose during a UN Press Conference regarding whether the “responsibility to protect” can interfere with national sovereignty, the Spokesperson said “that the Secretary-General had made clear that it did not”. Upon reflection, however, we echo this question to our readers: Do States’ international social and environmental responsibilities trump national sovereignty?

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Finally, we have received information that a decision on the continuing work on international environmental governance (see Vol. 39 No. 4–5, p. 196) will be presented at the next meeting of the UNEP Governing Council. We are curious about what will be proposed and how the Council will then deal with this vital issue. We hope they will not rely on the old recipe “when you have a problem create or prolong a committee”, but instead find an effective solution.

8 December, 2009

- Wolfgang Breyer -