

Very Important Prospect

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT,
TO BE HELD IN THE RIOCENTRO CONFERENCE CENTRE, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL,
DURING 1–12 JUNE 1992

In December 1989, the United Nations General Assembly decided to convene a UN Conference on Environment and Development, which will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. It will be a gathering of the whole community of nations represented by their Heads of State or Government, making it the largest summit conference ever held.

The 1992 'Earth Summit' is about environment *and* development, recognizing (1) that environmental impacts arise as a result of our economic behaviour, and consequently (2) can only be addressed effectively by changes in that behaviour. Thus the main task of the 1992 Conference will be to move the joint issues of environment and development into the centre of economic policy and decision-making, and to take decisions that will effect the major transition in our economic life and behaviour in the manner required to place the world community on the pathway to a sustainable environmental and economic future. The challenge is to translate into action the principles of sustainable development set out in the 1987 'Brundtland' report 'Our Common Future', of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

While the list of individual issues which the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 44/228, asked the Conference to address — including climate change, biodiversity, and the management of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes — may seem at first sight to be primarily environmental in nature, the causes of virtually all environmental issues have their origins in the development process or in its failures and inadequacies, so it is only through improved management of development processes that these issues can be addressed.

This provides the context in which the 1992 Conference will be held. It will be preceded by more than two years of intensive preparatory work and negotiations carried out under the direction of a Preparatory Committee of the UN General Assembly, and open to all its members. With the help of the Secretariat, which serves the Committee, it will prepare a *series of concrete measures* designed to establish the basis for transition to a more promising and sustainable future for our planet than could otherwise be expected. These include:

- (i) An 'Earth Charter' or Declaration of basic principles for the conduct of nations and peoples in respect of environment *and* development — to ensure the future viability and integrity of the Earth as a hospitable home for human and other forms of life;
- (ii) Agreements on specific legal measures, *e.g.* conventions for the protection of the atmosphere and of biological diversity, which would be negotiated prior to the Conference and signed or agreed to at the Conference;
- (iii) An agenda for action, 'Agenda 21', establishing the agreed work programme of the international community for the period beyond 1992 and into the 21st century in respect of the issues to be addressed by the Conference — with priorities, targets, cost estimates, modalities, and assignment of responsibilities;

and the means to implement this agenda through:

- (iv) New and additional financial resources;
- (v) Transfer of technology; and
- (vi) Strengthening of institutional capacities and processes.

The 'Earth Summit' presents to the governments of the world — with the active help of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations — a unique and timely opportunity to establish the basis for transition to a secure and sustainable future for our planet. The protection of The Biosphere as the indispensable basis for the maintenance and well-being of life on Earth must become our highest priority.

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