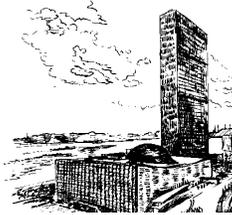


## Part 5



# Science, Technology, and Research

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### **UN Environment Program (UNEP)**

The UNEP is the principal UN forum for global environmental issues. The United States has been a leading financial and technical contributor since its creation in 1972. UNEP's primary responsibilities are to assess the state of the environment, to provide early warning of environmental threats, and to promote international cooperation and action in response.

UNEP has had historic success as a catalyst, and has launched a number of environmental conventions. But in recent years it has not lived up to its potential. In 1997, member states addressed organizational problems by adopting a focused mandate, the Nairobi Declaration, and by creating the High-level Committee of [Environment] Ministers (HLC) to provide policy guidance and to lead a process of institutional reform.

The reform process accelerated in 1998. In February, former German environment minister Klaus Toepfer took the reins as Executive Director. He addressed the first substantive meeting of the HLC, highlighting the need to strengthen environmental monitoring, assessment, and early warning activities, and to increase administrative efficiency. Toepfer also announced that he had been appointed by the Secretary General to chair a task force aimed at system-wide improvement in the environmental function. A number of countries, including the United States, tabled proposals for UNEP reform.

The Fifth Special Session of the Governing Council (GC) met in Nairobi in May. The Executive Director unveiled a new, functionally based organizational structure. The GC endorsed prompt implementation of outstanding recommendations pertaining to management and administrative support, the transfer of identified savings to program activities, and increased involvement of governments in program and budget formulation.

The HLC met briefly in November to further discuss reform issues and to consider UNEP's input into the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The financial report indicated that the trend of declining contributions by member governments had stopped.

UNEP continued to make progress on key issues of importance to the United States. It supported the implementation of various international agreements such as the Basel Convention on trade in hazardous wastes; the Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol to reduce the use of ozone-depleting substances; the Biodiversity Convention to protect against species loss; and the Convention to Combat Desertification. UNEP also continued its work through the regional seas program to implement the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. Finally, UNEP was instrumental in concluding the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, and launched an effort to limit certain persistent organic pollutants.

The United States continued its support for UNEP's scientific monitoring and assessment, through participation in several of its programs, in particular the Global Resource Information Database, the Global Environmental Monitoring System, and the environmental information retrieval system called INFOTERRA.

## **Protection of World Climate**

### **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC)**

The FCCC entered into force in March 1994. It unites over 170 nations in the effort to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels that would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. In adopting the Kyoto Protocol to the FCCC in December 1997, developed nations, as a whole, agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 5.2 percent below 1990 levels during the period 2008-2012.

The United States signed the Kyoto Protocol during the Fourth Conference of Parties (COP-4), which met at Buenos Aires in November 1998. In addition to domestic action, the United States intends to meet its own target through the use of international emissions trading, joint implementation among developed countries, and the Clean Development Mechanism, which involves project activities in developing countries.

The most significant outcome of COP-4 was the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. This plan sets forth a two-year process to elaborate rules for the market-based implementation mechanisms noted above, for the underlying compliance regime, for the treatment of carbon sinks, and for other key U.S. climate-change objectives. With respect to implementation mechanisms, the United States has endorsed rules providing the greatest environmental benefit at least cost. It advocates a compliance regime based on transparent and effective monitoring, measurement, and reporting systems.

Success in mitigating climate change depends on a long-term commitment by all nations, including developing countries and countries with

economies in transition. It is encouraging that Argentina and Kazakhstan each pledged at COP-4 to take on binding emissions targets. They are the first developing countries to do so.

### **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**

The IPCC, begun in 1988 as a joint effort of the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program, is the authoritative international scientific and technical assessment body with respect to climate change. Its Fourteenth Plenary was held in Vienna, Austria, in September 1998. The IPCC officially launched its Third Assessment Report at that time.

The IPCC also contributed to international negotiations through preparation and review of technical reports requested by the FCCC. Work continues on studies of technology transfer, emission scenarios, and land-use change and forestry issues. U.S. scientists chair the IPCC and cochair its Working Group II, which considers impacts, adaptation, and mitigation.

### **UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)**

UNSCEAR was established by the General Assembly in 1955 to provide continuous review and evaluation of the effects of ionizing radiation on humans and their environment. Radiation in this context covers both natural and human-made (i.e., from atmospheric and surface nuclear explosions) environmental radiation, and medical and occupational exposures. The Committee receives, assembles, and compiles reports and information furnished by its member states, members of the United Nations, specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and non-governmental organizations on observed levels of ionizing radiation and on scientific observations and experiments relevant to the effects of ionizing radiation on people and the environment.

The 47th session of UNSCEAR met May 25-29 in Vienna, Austria. On the basis of documents prepared by the UNSCEAR Secretariat, the Committee reviewed and worked on the following documents: Natural Radiation Exposures, Exposures from Man-made Sources of Radiation, Medical Radiation Exposures, Occupational Radiation Exposures, Dose Assessment Methodologies, Epidemiological Evaluation of Radiation-induced Cancer, DNA Repair and Mutagenesis, Hereditary Effects of Radiation, Combined Effects of Radiation and Other Agents, Biological Effects of Low-level Radiation, and Local Exposures and Effects from the Chernobyl Accident. The year 1998 was the second of a four-year investigation cycle of these matters, with the next major report to be published in 2000.

In response to a request in 1997 by the UN General Assembly that they consider the status of UNSCEAR, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and UNSCEAR itself all recommended to the General Assembly in March 1998 that UNSCEAR maintain

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its present functions and role. Accordingly, in December 1998, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 53/44 maintaining the current functions and role of UNSCEAR as an independent body.