

enough of his functioning to judge that he was eminently capable of convening and running such events, while on the other I knew, from my own experience of being personally responsible for four International Conferences on Environmental Future extending over the past 20 years, that the many tasks involved in such ventures had become increasingly heavy of late — such that nobody should undertake them lightly as a mere extra personal responsibility. But now, having participated in the above event, and Mr Laughton having obtained the necessary official support and financial backing at least to initiate other GEMs, I am convinced that his idea was at least a worthy one. More than this, it adds a further dimension to the unofficial — indeed unsung and unpushed — tendency of Geneva to be looked on as a much-needed centre of world environmental interests and activities*.

Although probably too late to have any serious influence on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), this Meeting will have been useful to intending participants of the latter as an airing-ground and more — especially as it is to be followed later by a second GEM with the leading objective of discussing the results of UNCED and the prospects of effective implementation of whatever comes out of it. To discuss such wide and often leading topics, there was a clientèle of governmental and institutional experts as well as leaders from industry and business — indeed an interesting (as well as interested) mixture mostly of European provenance but including extra-European scientists, diplomats, and politicians, altogether assuring a healthy cross-section of world opinion. This was facilitated by effective simultaneous interpretation of English into French and French into English, with a happy aura throughout of frankness and friendly give-and-take encouraged by fair and expert chairmanship.

Present and keenly involved in this first GEM were a liberal sprinkling of international eminents including Professors James E. Lovelock (modestly discussing the scientific value or otherwise of the 'Gaia Hypothesis'), Francesco di Castri (lately President of ICSU's SCOPE and still Deputy Director-General of UNESCO but about to return to academic life), William Nierenberg (Director Emeritus of Scripps Institution of Oceanography), Drs Michel Batisse (President of the Mediterranean Blue Plan and Senior Environmental Adviser to UNESCO) and Bedrich Moldan (Chairman of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation and Member of the Czech Parliament), and Messrs Paul Ekins (Founding Coordinator of the Living Economy Network and Chairman of New Consumer, London), the Hon. J. Hugh Faulkner PC of Canada (Executive Director of the Business Council For Sustainable Development), and Ahmed Zaki (Former Prime Minister and now Speaker of the House of Representatives, Republic of Maldives), who terminated the final plenary session with a reasoned but moving plea for his multi-island nation and other archipelagos threatened by sea-level rises due, basically, to The Biosphere's too many and

too profligate people. The totality of participants numbered about 200 and ranged up to 90 years of age; yet despite asking privately the frank opinions of several, the only grumble which I heard was that too many topics were introduced to allow for their in-depth discussion in the limited time available.

An interesting feature of this first GEM (and we hope of others) was the organization of Study Groups having the objective of 'combining business, official, and other, experts to work together continuously in future on specific sectoral and regional problems, with a view to reaching concrete project conclusions.' The Study Groups were on (1) Finance and Financial Instruments; (2) Integrated Resource Management; (3) Military and Nuclear Disposal, Conversion, and Environmental Impact of Defence; (4) Regional Environmental Planning; (5) Fragile Ecosystems and Environmentally Sustainable Travel; and (6) Communication and Education. These being run contemporaneously in two groups, the undersigned followed only the last, of which he was co-chairman with Robert Lamb, Director of the Television Trust for The Environment, London (see also the Editorial Section of our Autumn issue, pp. 197–200).

We look forward to future GEMs — we would like to suggest, after the post-Rio one, at some regular date yearly such as might well encompass Biosphere Day — as indeed 'organized in a spirit of public service, independence, and impartiality, without commitment to any particular political, commercial, or regional, interest', and most naturally in Geneva as the emerging centre of collation of environmental interests and activities.

NICHOLAS POLUNIN

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, HELD IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, DURING 3–14 JUNE 1992, AND THE '92 GLOBAL FORUM, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, 1–14 JUNE 1992

I never did find out what was in the package awaiting me on registration, because the smart 'RIO 92' carrier-bag, sponsored by the City Council and Tourism Authority, disgorged its contents down a drain, through an ill-glued bottom, just as I was boarding the airport bus. Charlie Chaplin couldn't have done it better! My neighbour for the ride, a charming and well-adorned representative of the 'Women Studies' NGO from Omdurman, Sudan, was a fitting reminder that the World was coming to Rio. Somehow, we found ourselves talking about the indigenous Brazilian word *abacaxi*, which, strictly, means pineapple, but is also slang for a muddle or a mess. (She saw a similarity with a Sudanese word *bakash*, which has the same connotation.) We both knew that, with us, many thousands of people were descending on this beautiful, dangerous, steaming and teeming, city at the same time, and the symbolism of our discussion was lost on neither of us. What sort of an *abacaxi* awaited us?

Excellent Organization and Security

Although certain of the more militant NGOs may not agree, I believe that it was a brilliant stroke of organization to arrange for the Global Forum to be well-separated (thirty kilometers or so) from the formal UNCED proceedings. If this had not been the case, present and future agendas would have become impossibly entangled, and security — for everyone — would have become a nightmare. As it

*Another such new dimension could be that the much-needed collating office of the proposed International Council for Environmental Education (see p. 89 of our Spring issue) might best be situated in the International Academy of The Environment at Conches, Geneva, though the proposed 'International Court of the Environment, modelled on the International Court of Justice at The Hague' (see p. 176 of our Summer issue) is no longer favoured in view of the existence already of another, allied body in the same place. — see page 296 of this issue, item 3.

was, our Brazilian hosts coped — in both ‘centres’ — with the most esoteric of problems in a human way that only those nations with real problems can accomplish.

While registration at the Global Forum was simple, UNCED security at Riocentro was superlative. Brazilian military forces, in sundry shades of khaki and green, lined the route and were only a few yards apart. There were armoured vehicles and even tanks strategically placed. Gun-barrels (unprimed, we later read) were symbolically pointed at the *favelas* and serious crime became, for two weeks, a thing of the past. Our own sense of well-being was enhanced by the delight of the *Cariocas* at being able fully to enjoy their own marvellous city for the first time in years.

Outside Flamengo Park, forgers and sneak-thieves were soon doing a roaring trade in Global Forum passes, shoulder to shoulder with peddlers and musicians. The atmosphere was festive.

Inside the enormous, oblong, green Park — soon enthusiastically trampled, to the alleged delight of the critics of ‘green’ movements, into a uniform brown expanse of dust — there were 35 ‘structures’, to be used day-and-night for meetings, conventions, rallies, and exhibitions. There were also no fewer than (we were assured) 675 prefabricated stalls for NGOs. The sheer numbers and the variety of persuasions of NGOs present, their intoxicating enthusiasm, their sense of common interest; all this and more made Flamengo Park a fair-ground with a purpose. Film-stars were photographed looking earnest about this and that. An Amerindian arrived from the Amazon with a Jaguar (*Felis onca*) skin for sale...

Healthy Rivalry Expectable

While the zaniest pressure-groups somehow got away with their crazy contentions, a number of better-known names nearly tipped the occasion from the sublime into the ridiculous. A sense of Global Forum *versus* UNCED began to be cultivated: them against us. Shortcomings and delays in the ongoing negotiations at Riocentro were headlined; demonstrations and marches were organized. ‘BUSH GO HOME’ said a banner behind which tramped a small group of angry-looking people, before the United States President had even arrived. I found myself thinking — and even saying — that it was sad how certain NGOs did not have more pride. It was, after all, due to pressure from many of them that UNCED was actually taking place.

Meanwhile, at Riocentro, square brackets for insertion and deadlines to meet were the order of the day. A senior Swiss delegate has since told me that all the important discussions took place in closed session. But I am not so certain: Riocentro is an immense exhibition area which was transformed for the duration into an alternative UN complex. Logistics, timing, organization — all were impeccable. The lowliest helper inevitably offered to take one there rather than point out the route. The President of Brazil, in spite of gathering political clouds, did not put a foot wrong. In the main exhibition hall there were nearly 200 booths for Sovereign States and other entities. But for the heat, this was an ideal place for lobbying. Common refrains were ‘Where is Nepal?’ or ‘What and Where is Belarus?’ Civil servants, ambassadors, and ministers, scurried about.

The Plenary Hall was air-conditioned, and one occasionally had the impression that some plenipotentiaries

were exceeding the seven-minutes’ rule in order to avoid — so to speak — the ‘greenhouse effect’. For reasons of diplomacy, the President was only able to remind subsequent speakers to keep their presentations short. But speak they did, and soon it seemed that ‘Biodiversity’, ‘Climate Change’, and ‘Sustainability’, were second-nature to them. If over one hundred Heads of State from North and South can be persuaded to bone up on such subjects, then real progress *has* been made.

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IV INTECOL WETLANDS CONFERENCE, HELD AT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS, OHIO, USA, DURING 13–18 SEPTEMBER 1992

A total of 905 mostly wetland experts from 52 countries gathered at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, USA, from 13–18 September 1992, to discuss wetland issues in a meeting entitled ‘Global Wetlands — Old World and New.’ This was the largest meeting ever held on wetlands in the world, and brought together scientists from both developing and developed nations to seek common understanding of the world wetland systems and to set new directions for the 21st century. More than 500 papers were presented in 14 symposia and 30 sessions and panels. The meeting’s sponsor was INTECOL (International Society of Ecology), with cooperation from many US and international groups — including the US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, the Wildfowl Trust of North America, Ducks Unlimited Inc., the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS), the Association of Wetland Managers Inc., and several other public and private organizations. International organizations contributing to the Conference included the International Lake Environment Committee (ILEC), of Otsu, Japan, the International Society for Ecological Modelling (ISEM), of Copenhagen, Denmark, Societas Internationalis Limnologiae (SIL), the International Society for Tropical Ecology (ISTE), and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), of Slimbridge, England, UK.

Delivered at the Conference were papers on all of the world’s great wetlands. New World wetlands discussed included the Pantanal and Amazonian Floodplain of Brazil, the Parana River Delta of Argentina, the Orinoco Delta of Venezuela, Laguna de Terminos in Mexico; the Everglades, Mississippi River Delta, and Lake Agassiz Peatlands, of the USA, the Laurentian Great Lake Wetlands of North America, and the Hudson Bay Lowlands and Bay of Fundy in Canada. The Old World was represented by papers on the Niger River (Nigeria), the Camargue (France), Biebraza Valley (Poland), Mira Estuary (Portugal), St Michel Bay (France), Lower Volga (Russia), Lake Naivasha (Kenya), Neusiedlersee (Austria), and The Marais Poitevin (France), among others. Asian and Australian Wetlands included Poyanghu, Taihu, Dianchi, and Qinghaihu of China, Rihand and Ganges Rivers of India, Mai Pokhari Wetlands of Nepal, the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, Mai Po Marshes of Hong Kong, Kushiro Marsh of Japan, and Lowbridge Wetlands of Australia.