

Book reviews

The rights and wrongs of Rio

THE EARTH SUMMIT: THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (UNCED)

edited with introduction and commentary by Stanley Johnson

International Environmental Law And Policy Series, Graham and Trotman/Martinus Nijhoff, London and Dordrecht, 1993

THE EARTH SUMMIT AGREEMENTS; A GUIDE AND ASSESSMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RIO '92 CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

by Michael Grubb, Matthias Koch, Abby Munson, Francis Sullivan and Koy Thomson

Earthscan Publications/Royal Institute for International Affairs, London, 1993

THE EARTH SUMMIT'S AGENDA FOR CHANGE: A PLAIN LANGUAGE VERSION OF AGENDA 21 AND THE OTHER RIO AGREEMENTS

by Michael Keating

Centre for Our Common Future, Geneva, 1993

EARTH SUMMIT 1992: THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, RIO DE JANEIRO 1992

edited by Joyce Quarrie

The Regency Press Corporation, London, 1993

The wide range of these books demonstrates the wide range of levels at which the 1992 Rio meeting can be discussed and assessed. Despite the aims of the Earth Summit – pro-

claimed to strike a global bargain between the nations and peoples of the world – it was obvious that at the end it had been rather like most major international summit meetings, although much bigger. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and indeed the press, may have been invited in force but were still on the sidelines of, or even excluded entirely from, the key decision making sessions. The NGOs had their own conferences and their own parties but were largely peripheral to the formal outcomes of the Summit. It is these formal outcomes – the documents – with which all these books are concerned.

In documentary terms the major outcomes of the Rio Meeting were fivefold: two Conventions (the Framework Convention of Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity); the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; the Statement on Forest Principles; and the 600-page *Agenda 21* – an action plan for the years to the 21st century and beyond.

To the non-specialist some of this is pretty intractable stuff. Perhaps there should be a new roll of honour drawn up to parallel UNEP's Global 500 to list those who have read all this documentation in the original? Or perhaps simply for those who have read all the 600 pages of *Agenda 21*? The honour roll might exceed 500 but not I suspect by many multiples. The main point is that there are many interested persons and groups who need, or ought to need, to know, or could benefit from knowing, about certain aspects of these instruments. All would find at least one of this range of collections valuable.

For an international environmental lawyer, such as your reviewer, the top of the pile is Johnson's collection. This contains the verbatim texts of all five primary documents together with a selection of other primary documents: the 1989 UN General Assembly Re-

solution 44/228 establishing the agenda for UNCED, the 1990 Report of the UN Secretary General on Preparations for UNCED, the Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur Declarations of 1992 and the texts of speeches made at the beginning and end of the Rio Summit. To this Johnson adds his own well informed and witty commentary and an introduction, 'Did we really save the World at Rio?' For the record he takes the view, as most do, that the jury is still out.

The second work comes from Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, with a world-class research reputation. This takes a very different approach. It claims to be 'a major summary and analysis of UNCED'. It is in fact more of a summary than an analysis and at 180 pages, given the complexity of the issues involved, the term 'major' is clearly inappropriate. It is, however, very useful indeed. It has appeared very quickly after the Conference and provides many perceptive analyses of the negotiating agendas of the meeting as well as of the outcomes. Particularly good is the introductory section putting the Rio meeting into context.

Earth Summit '92 is the glossy version. The texts of the Rio Declaration and of *Agenda 21* (lightly edited) are enlivened by pictures and by a racier format. It is prefaced by a series of short, well informed essays on aspects of the Summit by significant figures in the environmental field, including Lester Brown, founder of the World Watch Institute and Lee Kimball, previously with the World Resources Institute. This publication is underwritten by a range of industrial and commercial sponsors. Profits from sales go to the International Institute for Environment and Development in London. As an accessible, easily referenced version of the texts it is well worthwhile.

Finally there is the plain language version of *Agenda 21* at \$10 or less, produced by the Centre for Our Com-