

By Stanton Miller

Brazil, home of the largest remaining rain forest in the world, will be the site for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992. This conference will be the largest assembly of environmental policy makers in this decade. It will be held June 1–12 and will include World Environment Day (June 5). The goal of the conference is to strengthen efforts for promoting sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries. The conference will be attended by representatives of 160 U.N. delegations and 137 accredited nongovernmental organizations.

The first meeting of an organizing committee for the Brazil agenda was held in Geneva March 18–April 5. Some environmental problems on which international collaborations are sought are listed in the box.

The Brazil conference will meet on the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972 when idealism had its day. The consensus at Stockholm was that the environment was lifted out of the narrow context of national policy into that of international policy. It also clearly articulated the link between economic growth and protection of the environment.

At a preparatory meeting on March 19, 1991, Secretary General of the UNCED Maurice F. Strong pointed out that there will be a transition to an environmentally driven economy. He said, "We do not start our journey to Rio in 1992 from zero." In a session last year, José Lutzenberger, special secretary for the environment from Brazil, called for "a reappraisal not just of our actions, but of our motivations."

Later, on March 25, in his remarks at a ceremony commemorating World Meteorological Day and the 41st anniversary of the World Meteorological Organization, Strong's theme was "The Atmosphere of the Living Planet Earth." In his address he said a few things about the Rio de Janeiro conference and its planning and preparation processes. The fol-

# 1992 EARTH SUMMIT IN RIO







*Maurice Strong*  
*UNCED Secretary General*

#### Some topics for international collaboration at UNCED

Climate change	Environment and development education
Ozone depletion	Protection of oceans, all kinds of seas
Transboundary air pollution	Sound management of hazardous wastes
Combating deforestation	Protection of fresh water resources
Soil loss, desertification, and drought	New, reliable sources of renewable energy
Conservation of biological diversity	Environmental education

Following are quotes from his remarks.

"There is clearly no substitute for the United Nations. It is the only multilateral organization that is universal in its membership and global in its mandate. There is no practical alternative but to accord to it the support it must have to provide in the period ahead the services to the world community which can be provided in no other way. The U.N. must provide the basis for the new area of international cooperation that is necessary to secure our common future.

"The road to Brazil will not be an easy one. The debates in the U.N.

General Assembly which preceded the decision to hold the 1992 Conference demonstrated the divisive nature of the key issues of resource flows and technology transfers. There is clearly no consensus on these issues at this point. Building that consensus is the principal challenge that confronts us during the less than 15 months which we have to prepare for the Conference.

"The preparatory process is now well under way under the direction of the Preparatory Committee set up by the General Assembly and consisting of its entire membership of over 160 nations. The second Sub-

stantive Session of the Committee and its Working Groups is now under way in Geneva and, I am pleased to report, is making good progress in defining the issues that will be presented to the leaders of the world when they gather in Rio in June 1992.

"But to achieve the objectives of the Conference will take nothing less than a fundamental shift in the existing political inertia and in our economic and security priorities. This will be an immense challenge to our political will and our capacity for diplomatic dexterity and institutional innovation. It will require the active engagement and participation of people at all levels of society—citizen groups, educators, voluntary and public interest organizations of all kinds—and, of course, the media. The recent dramatic upsurge of public interest in and concern for the environment provides a promising basis for this."

There have been a number of debates in the U.N. General Assembly on topics for the Rio summit. For example, in March there were debates on conservation of biological diversity, climate, soil, and the oceans.

These discussions, debates, and statements indicate the level of activity for this upcoming summit. In his statement to the second session of the Preparatory Committee for UNCED, Strong said that this meeting marked the transition from analysis to action. "World leaders will come to Rio expecting to make clear and concrete decisions (on myriad topics) and this is what will be expected of them. A next session of the Preparation Committee will be in August in Geneva; a final meeting of the Preparatory Committee will be held in New York in January or February 1992.

"Of particular importance, however, will be the need to provide one special session at which all heads of states or governments present would participate in a ceremony which would affirm in an appropriate manner their commitment to a secure and sustainable future for our planet that might include signing of the Earth Charter and/or the Earth Convention."

#### Additional reading

*Environ. Sci. Technol.* **1972**, 6, 682-3.

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