

renewable natural resources; extinction of species and damage to human mental and physical health. Poverty was also brought up as the cause of many environmental problems. Finally, 25 principles were agreed upon to confront the problem.

However, ten years later, at an evaluation meeting held in Nairobi, it was decided that the results obtained had not produced sufficient international response and environmental deterioration had already reached alarming proportions, endangering vast areas of the world.

In December 1989, the UN General Assembly approved the organization of a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also called the Earth Summit, with headquarters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In two years four preparatory meetings were held to define bases for common action to reach sustainable development without leading the planet to ecological catastrophe.

The starting point

The conference was organized under the basic assumption of the need for a new type of international cooperation, in matters of financial resources, clean technology and the struggle

Background

Before the Earth Summit came the 1972 Stockholm UN Human Habitat Conference. Under the "One Earth" slogan, the representatives of 110 countries sought a way to develop awareness of the speedy destruction of the environment and its worldwide effects.

In the Stockholm declaration, attention was drawn to the harmful effects of the indiscriminate application of scientific and technological advances: water, air and earth pollution; ecological imbalance of the biosphere; destruction and depletion of non-

The Earth Summit: too many concessions

The UN Environment and Development Conference, held in Rio de Janeiro, June 3-14 this year, considered the most ambitious meeting recently called by the UN, concluded without commitments or agendas that might reflect concrete answers to the environmental problems caused by development.

against poverty, as conditions to reconcile development with environmental protection.

The principle obstacle in the attainment of these agreements was having to overcome the confrontation between poor and rich countries. The former believe they should make the latter pay the cost of destruction as they were the first to adopt a destructive model of anarchic development centered on the depletion of resources which they export to other parts of the world through transnational industries.

Furthermore, economic inequality in relation to the North, Northern exploitation of natural resources, the weight of foreign debt and internal economic and social problems, prevent the Southern countries from channeling resources into environmental programs.

The Northern countries refuse to take greater responsibility for concrete financial and technological commitments to the Southern countries.

By insisting on the need to modify economic relations between nations as a condition to striking a harmonious balance between environment and development, the conference undertook

the most trying exercise in multilateral diplomacy ever attempted.

Unfortunately, expectations far outdistanced the tenuous results obtained.

Organization of the conference: facts and figures

The Summit was amazing, if not for the results obtained, then for the record attendance, the cost of its organization and the chaos of information generated. In two weeks, more than 400 official as well as non-official meetings, conferences, cultural activities and demonstrations were held.

According to press data,¹ the Summit lured more than 30,000 visitors, of which 8,100 took part in the

event organized by the UN, 7,222 were accredited journalists from various parts of the world and the rest were tourists and members of more than 2,000 non-governmental organizations, representing more than 116 countries.

The latter participated in alternative forums held at the same time: the International Non-Governmental Forum, the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders, and the Earth Parliament.

The organization of the Summit cost nearly 95 million dollars. The UN contributed 40 million and the Brazilian government contributed the rest in expenses directly tied to the event, as well as collaborating, along with various European governments, in financing the International Non-Governmental Forum.

The Brazilian government and its agencies invested more than a trillion dollars in "cosmetic surgery" for the headquarters city: construction of a fast route from the airport to the convention center, cleaning and improvement of beaches and parks as well as the removal of "street children" from the streets and beaches.

Paradoxically Brazil's total 1992 budget for environmental affairs was 60 million dollars, and environmental



A record number of world leaders participated in the two-day Summit.

¹ The figures quoted were taken from Mexican newspapers, *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*, and from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

monitoring has almost been paralyzed due to lack of resources.

Delegates from more than 175 countries participated, including government, social sector and international and regional institution representatives, as well as more than 110 chiefs of state and government. For the Brazilian government this meant more than 20 million dollars expenditure to prepare the conference headquarters and to provide its visitors with security, according to standards requested by the UN. The army and police patrolled Rio de Janeiro streets for two weeks turning it into the safest city in the world.

In the end, the Summit was not spared ecological destruction. Damage was reported to Flamengo park where various non-governmental events took place. Tons of fish died in Lake Jacarepagua as a result of sewage from the conference's main buildings. It is also said that the Kuwaiti delegation left the country with more than 100 cages containing tropical Brazilian birds in spite of laws prohibiting the sale and export of such fauna.

Objectives, disagreements and results

From the time it was convoked, the Earth Summit was considered the most important global gathering in history, due both to the number of countries represented as well as the ambitious agenda offered for discussion and approval, which included:

1. Three international conventions describing specific measures to protect the atmosphere, biodiversity, and forests: *Convention on Biodiversity*, *Convention on Climatic Change* and *Convention on Forests*.
2. Signature of a world environmental plan for economic and environmental action aimed at achieving sustainable development, known as *Agenda 21*.



José Antonio Trejo.

The destruction of the environment has worldwide effects.

3. A declaration of basic global principles on environment and development called *The Earth Letter*.

For two weeks the vast gulf separating North and South was made abundantly evident. The most controversial points, the ones that would determine the results obtained were: the responsibility and financing of sustainable development programs; which international agency would be responsible for assigning resources and following up the programs; and North-South commitments on technical assistance and transfer of technology.

The *Convention on Biodiversity* was, from the outset of preliminary negotiations, one of the most conflictive. Its object is to preserve plant and animal life. It refers particularly to the international treatment of genes, species, biotic populations and ecosystems, and control of the technologies to improve them.

The document prevents the industrialized nations' biotechnological industries from having unlimited access to the Third World's genetic wealth; it states that natural resources are the exclusive preserve of each nation's sovereignty and proposes Third World access to new technologies for ecological preservation.

The US compared this document to signing a blank check, because it forces the industrialized nations to direct millions in resources to environmental aid for Third World countries. Furthermore, it does not provide for recognition of intellectual property in the use of biotechnology.

It was for these reasons that President Bush refused to sign it in spite of the isolation and unanimous criticism it earned him from all participating nations (including such traditional US allies as Great Britain), non-governmental organizations and sectors of US society.

The final document maintains that the Northern nations be allowed a level of access to the biological resources of the South as long as the latter have access to the technological resources of the former. In spite of the fact that all other industrialized and Third World nations signed the document, the US' lone refusal endangers the fulfillment of the commitments agreed upon, displaying the weakness of attempts at international cooperation when they are contrary to the particular interests of powerful states.

The *Convention on Climatic Change* also provoked heated debate and sad results. After two years of negotiations, the proposed document stressed the adoption of commitments and specific targets to regulate carbon

dioxide emissions which produce the greenhouse effect and destroy the ozone layer, severely affecting climate and agriculture.

The industrialized nations were the most compromised considering they generate three quarters of the world's gas emissions, with the US responsible for 25%. The US, defying the commitment made by the EEC, warned that it would not sign a document forcing it to take on a concrete commitment to reduce emissions by the year 2000, due to the cost to its already weakened economy. The final proposal, aimed at gaining the inclusion of the US was ambiguous, as neither specific targets nor agendas were set.

The *Convention on Forests*, resolved at the last minute, reflected divergent interests at play. The wood-producing developing countries rejected the developed nations' position on the protection of forests, calling it interventionist.

In one of the few victories for the South, it was determined that fiscal or trade barriers could not be raised against the wood trade.

Agreement was reached on the promotion of international cooperation



Pedro Valterra / Cuartoscuro.

Cyclists in Mexico City.

in the handling of forests, without including an instrument of judicial force, as the industrialized nations wished. In harmony with the rest of the Summit, the declaration neglects to mention specific targets to reduce deforestation.

The other fundamental document that caused disappointment was the *Agenda 21*. It contains 115 programs in 900 pages that define the financing sources and mechanisms to attain world development with environmental criteria. Like the previous documents, its main obstacle is lack of definition of financial commitment to make the proposals real.

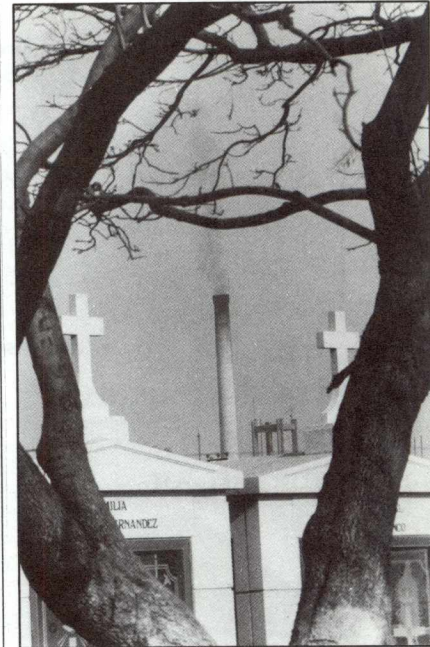
The Group of 77, which includes 128 developing nations, plus China, proposed that the industrialized nations increase their aid to developing countries from 0.35% to 0.7% of their GDP, setting the year 2000 as the deadline.

According to the UN, 125 billion dollars would be required annually between 1993 and 2000, a figure considered unrealistic by the industrialized nations (Germany, Canada, the US, France, England, Italy and Japan). They refused to accept the commitment and it all ended with a text qualified as rhetorical, which states the increase will take place "as soon as possible", without setting limits or deadlines.

The industrialized nations promised financial aid to the Third World for 6 to 7 billion dollars, causing deep disappointment among delegates from poor nations.

Furthermore, the Group of 77 set aside its demand for the creation of a new fund to administer financial support (substituting the Global Environment Fund,) in exchange for guarantees of democratization in the assignment of resources, for until now these criteria have been defined by the donors.

Finally, the *Rio Declaration*, approved at the Summit's last plenary session by heads of state and



Heron Alemán / Imaginatina.

Is this the future we want for our planet?

government, contains 27 basic principles on states' rights and obligations regarding the environment.

Reference is made to the struggle against poverty as a guarantee of sustainable development, the sovereignty of states over their natural resources, and the importance of their ecologically responsible exploitation; it also apportions responsibilities on the principle that whoever pollutes will have to pay to fight the pollution.

On the whole, taking into account present patterns of consumption and styles of development that determine the deterioration of the environment, as well as the reigning inequality between North and South, it is difficult to say that big steps were taken by the Summit toward a more balanced world order aimed at retarding ecological deterioration and accelerating development.

Even for the most optimistic, the Rio Summit culminated in a series of ambiguous resolutions, devoid of concrete commitments, goals and agendas ❖

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