



# World Ecology Report

Critical Issues in Health and the Environment

*Knowledge brings new choices. Education brings new knowledge.*

## SPECIAL FOCUS:

In their coverage of United Nations activities over the past 50 years, the international press has tended to devote most of its attention to peace and security issues. Yet, over the course of its 50-year lifespan, the United Nations has played an increasingly pivotal role in many other important and diverse activities, activities that directly affect the lives of individuals and communities the world over. What follows is an overview of significant United Nations programs, past and present, in commemoration of this year's 50th Anniversary of the U.N.



**Signing the UN Charter on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco**

*SOURCE: UN Chronicle, Volume 32, Number 2, June 1995*

for improving the lives of inhabitants of member nations. Some 80% of U.N. energies have been devoted to improving public health and quality of living through the development and implementation of programmes within its various departments.

Two fundamental facts have guided U.N. efforts in this regard: three quarters of the world's population live among developing economies, and 1.3 billion of those live in abject poverty; while the world's 23 richest nations have a combined

per capita income of \$22,000, the 40 poorest nations have a combined per capita income of just \$390, a ratio that continues to widen. To address this enormous disparity in distribution of world resources, the U.N. has consistently stressed the need to reshape international economic relations. In 1974, the General Assembly adopted a declaration and action plan, the New International Economic Order (NIEO), outlining measures to narrow the widening economic gap between the northern and the southern hemisphere nations.

The principal mechanism within the U.N.'s organizational structure for realizing this goal has been the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). ECOSOC is the central forum for discussion and policy formulation on development issues. ECOSOC not only provides a platform from which the voices of previously disenfranchised populations are now heard, but acts as the

### ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The astonishing economic and social transformations that have taken place globally over the past 50 years have been significantly affected in their direction and shape by the United Nations. The international development agenda, as outlined by programs of the successive International Development Decades beginning in 1961, has aimed at attaining accelerated economic and social progress among developing nations, along with the development and implementation of policies formed in concert with the U.N. family of organizations.

While the international community's attention has often focused primarily on immediate political concerns, the U.N. has consistently adopted a broader view in its efforts to achieve a more equitable model

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**Young villagers wave their certificates proving that the health worker has completed their vaccination.**

**SOURCE:** *World Health*, May-June 1993

coordinating body for the integration of global developmental goals and practices.

Such goals are given practical expression through ECOSOC programs ranging from technical cooperation and assistance, to surveys, studies, and documentation, to the sponsorship of international conferences and conventions, to the development of comprehensive development planning projects. Annually, the U.N. disburses more than \$10 billion in projects that include constructing irrigation systems and organizing primary health and education networks and facilities. Coupled with monies from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), the U.N. has loaned out almost \$500 billion since 1946.

#### **U.N. AGENCIES IMPROVE LIVES**

The U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) focuses on increased participation in the world economy for developing countries, as well as "countries in transition" to a market economy after the breakup of the Soviet system. UNCTAD is the main organ of the General Assembly on international trade issues, investment, finance, and technology transfer. It has successfully negotiated special trade preferences that enable develop-

ing nations to export products to developed nations, and has led the way in mobilizing support for the world's least developed nations.

The U.N. Development Program (UNDP) is the central coordinating organization for U.N. development actions worldwide, and has funded over 5,000 projects valued at about \$5.6 billion. UNDP programs are designed to help build government management capabilities, to develop human resources, and to orchestrate technology transfer in close cooperation with 187 member states, other U.N. agencies, and non-governmental organizations. In response to a reassessment of global economic development models (see *World Ecology Report*, Summer '95) the UNDP now emphasizes four specific areas of concern in its development agenda: poverty alleviation, employment opportunities, empowering women, and natural resources conservation and regeneration. Recognizing that all four of these areas of concern are integrally related, UNDP project guidelines provide a model for development assistance used by both private and public policy organizations.

#### **ENVIRONMENT**

The U.N. has played a central role in

shaping global action to protect the environment and in placing environmental considerations high on the international agenda. Led by the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP)—established after the groundbreaking Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 in Stockholm—programmes have been put in place to protect and monitor the ozone layer, to regulate hazardous waste materials, to prevent depletion of natural resource bases, especially in the ocean, and to combat desertification and deforestation. Together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, UNEP orchestrates a wide range of environmental resource monitoring and research programmes. UNEP has provided the management and organizational expertise to meet specific environmental emergencies, such as the oil spill in the Arabian Gulf during the 1991 Gulf Conflict.

#### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992—better known as the Rio Earth Summit—catalyzed a global effort to integrate environmental considerations into economic and social development agendas in order to achieve sustainable development.

Since the 1992 Earth Summit, a number of national and regional governments have implemented sustainable development commissions to continue the work begun by UNCED. Currently, the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) meets annually to monitor global implementation of the Earth Summit Plan of Action, known as *Agenda 21*, and to provide a high-level forum for policy discussions and consensus building. CSD, provides assistance on sustainable development practices to nations and communities throughout the world.

#### **HEALTH**

The U.N.'s achievements in the areas of human health constitute one of its most resounding success stories. The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided the interagency leadership in such areas as providing universal immunization for polio, tetanus, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, and tuberculosis among global populations, especially children. In 1974 only five percent of children among developing nations were immunized against these diseases; today, as a direct result of U.N. efforts, more than 80% are immunized, saving the lives of more than three million children every year.

Through oral rehydration therapy, water and sanitation, and other health and nutrition measures, the U.N.'s agencies have provided the leadership necessary to



**Illiteracy among Bangladeshi women is estimated at 74%**

*SOURCE: Unesco Sources, April 1995*

cut child mortality rates in half since 1960. Average life expectancy has doubled among developing nations over the last 30 years, rising from 37 to 67 years of age.

#### **WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

The U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) was established in 1969 to help developing nations solve their population problems and to raise awareness of population issues in both developing and industrialized nations. UNFPA programs in over 150 countries have helped governments formulate strategies for providing reproductive health and family planning services, to disseminate information about gender awareness and empowerment, and to conduct contraception research. UNFPA has from the outset placed the strongest emphasis in its programmes on the active participation and leadership of women, enabling millions of people to make informed, educated decisions about the number and timing of children. This has given some families—and especially many women—greater control over their lives.

In 1974, the first global inter-governmental conference on population was held in Bucharest and a World Population Plan of Action was initiated. Ten years later, the International Conference on Population held in Mexico City integrated approaches to population control and economic development, and adopted a formal policy of

improving the status of women and increasing their participation and leadership potential in all aspects of economic and social development. In 1994 the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo adopted a 20-year Program of Action endorsing a new strategy for addressing global population issues. The most crucial aspect of this new strategy is the development of political, economic, and social mechanisms for the empowerment of women in all parts of the world, especially through education and accessibility to health and reproductive services.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been one of the U.N.'s highest profile and greatest success stories. Since 1960, under-five mortality has been cut in half and primary school enrollment has doubled. UNICEF continues its efforts to reduce the number of preventable childhood deaths from communicable diseases not only through medical programmes but through the reduction of poverty, especially among developing nations.

At the World Summit for Children in 1990, representatives from over 150 nations—including 71 heads of state—formally adopted 27 specific health and development goals to dramatically improve the lives of children by the year 2000. Guided by UNICEF, more than 100 countries have finalized national programs to translate such calls for action into reality. As a result, approximately 2.5 million fewer children will die in 1996 than died in 1990, and millions more will be saved from the horror of debilitating afflictions caused by extremes of poverty and disease.

In 1989, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Conventions on the

Rights of Child to help ensure implementation of comprehensive standards pertaining to children's health, education, social development, personal freedom, and physical protection from abuse and ill treatment, including child labor and sexual exploitation.

#### **HABITAT II**

Among the most pressing of world problems today is the health of people living and working in urban centers. Since 1976, when the first U.N.-sponsored Habitat Conference took place in Vancouver, the U.N. has assisted governments in the development and management of human settlements, especially among urban areas. Currently, Habitat operates over 220 technical cooperation programmes with budgets totalling over \$180 million, and over the past five years Habitat projects have consistently resulted in national investment commitments ranging from \$1 to \$3 billion per year.

As the final in a series of major U.N. conferences, the City Summit—or Habitat II—will take place in Istanbul in June of 1996. Habitat II will help shape the economic and social development agenda for the 21st century by bringing together local authorities, the private sector, and non-governmental interests under one roof. The overall goal of the conference is to make the world's cities, towns, and villages healthy, safe, and socially equitable environments for the better sustenance of human life.

#### **AGRICULTURE, LABOR, AND INDUSTRY**

The U.N. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) assists the world's rural poor through its system



*SOURCE: First Call for Children, July-September 1995*



of providing credit for the improvement of food production, distribution, employment, and nutrition among the poorest and most marginalized groups. IFAD has benefited over 230 million people in over 100 developing nations since its inception at the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome.

The U.N. International Labor Organization (ILO) is the U.N. focal point for labor and employment issues. For its work in creating jobs, improving working conditions, developing comprehensive safety standards, and protecting workers' rights the ILO was awarded a 1969 Nobel Peace Prize. The ILO acts as the U.N.'s investigative arm, and responds to abuses in all parts of the world. Currently, the ILO is working to improve working conditions for over 100 million people among three separate continents.

The U.N. Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) encourages and financially assists developing nations in their promotion and acceleration of industrialization. UNIDO has brought together northern- and southern-hemisphere economic interests, as well as provided a forum for north-south and east-west investment by promoting entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

#### INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

This necessarily brief overview has not even touched on some of the U.N.'s most important achievements and ongoing works, particularly those related to human rights, education, crime and drug control, and decolonization. During the past 50 years, the United Nations has not only recognized the integral nature of global issues, but has also achieved specific goals through the implementation of vast projects. At this, its 50th birthday, the United Nations has committed itself to redoubling its efforts on behalf of people everywhere.

**SOURCES:** *The United Nations at 50*, UNDPI, Aug. '95; *Secretariat News*, March '95, June '95, July '95, Aug. '95; *Diplomatic World Bulletin*, July 16-23, July 24-31 '95; *ECOSOC Press Release*, June '95, July '95, Aug. '95; *UNDP Media Advisory*, Aug. '95; *GoBetween*, Apr/May '95, Jun/Jul '95, Aug/Sept '95; *NGLS Roundup*, July '95, Aug. '95; *WHO Press Release*, July '95, Aug. '95; *Child Survival-World Development Newsletter*, Jun/Jul '95, Aug/Sept '95; *UNDPI Programme Update*, Aug. '95.

#### SUGGESTED READING

- *United Nations: A Working Paper for Restructuring*, by Stassen. Minneapolis: 1994.
- *Una Nueva Carta de las Naciones Unidas*, by Vasquez. Mexico City: 1993.
- *Eroding the United Nations Charter*, by Blum. Boston: 1993.
- *World Peace through World Law*, by Clark and Sohn. Ann Arbor: 1992.
- *The United Nations Charter and the World Court*, by Elias. Lagos: 1989.
- *U.N. Charter as an Instrument of Peace*, by Eftimov. Moscow: 1986.

## Women and the UN: 1945-1995

**1945:** UN Charter—the first international instrument to establish principle of equality for men and women—is adopted.

**1946:** Commission on the Status of Women is established to promote women's political, economic and social rights.

**1949:** Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others is adopted by the General Assembly.

**1951:** International Labour Organization (ILO) adopts Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for work of Equal Value.

**1952:** General Assembly adopts Convention on Political Rights of Women, first global endorsement of political rights, including the right to vote.

**1957:** Convention on the Nationality of Married Women is adopted, granting women the right to retain or change their nationalities regardless of their husbands' actions.

**1960:** Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect to Employment and Occupation is adopted.

**1962:** General Assembly adopts Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.

**1967:** Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is adopted.

**1975:** The World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City) adopts first World Plan of Action. First Decade for Women: Equality, Development, Peace is proclaimed.

**1976:** Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade on Women (UNIFEM) and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) are established by the General Assembly.

**1979:** General Assembly adopts Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

**1980:** The World Conference of the UN Decade for Women (Copenhagen) reviews progress at mid-Decade.

**1985:** The third UN conference on women adopts the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000.

Voluntary Fund for UN Decade for Women becomes UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and autonomous organization within the UN Development Programme.

**1986:** First *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* is published.

**1991:** *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics* is published, a compilation of data on the global situation of women.

**1992:** UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro) recognizes key role of women in sustainable development.

**1993:** Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women is adopted by the General Assembly.

World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna) integrates violence against women and other women's rights issues into overall UN human rights agenda.

**1994:** International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo) marks first time empowerment of women is seen as an integral part of development.

**1995:** Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) will review and debate critical areas of concern and adopt a proposed Platform for Action.

Agenda of World Summit for Social Development reflects full range of women's issues; draft declaration contains commitment to ensuring equality.

**SOURCE:** *UN Chronicle*, June 1995

## HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT: *Live Better, Live Longer*

Most of the chronic, degenerative noncommunicable diseases are diseases of the second half of human life, and they are becoming more and more common as people live longer among both developed and developing nations. Decreasing incidences of death from one cause means increasing deaths from some other cause.

The most important of the noncommunicable diseases are the cardiovascular diseases, since the total number of sufferers in both developed and developing nations is higher than the total number for communicable diseases. A close second place is held by the different malignancies generally grouped under the heading "cancer," followed by the noncommunicable respiratory diseases, diabetes, and some other conditions including hereditary ailments and mental and neurological diseases.

Traditionally, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and hereditary diseases are grouped under a single heading, not only because they are caused by agents of a chemical and physical nature, which influence the hereditary system or the body's metabolism. Certain cancer groups are produced by biological factors like viruses, as well as by chronic infection and physical conditions that cause a cytotoxic process when they interfere with a cell's genetic mechanism. The latter is currently under extensive scientific investigation as a result of the contamination from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

A second group of conditions acts at the level of cell regulation, and produces the milieu in which the cancer cells begin to multiply. There are also hereditary conditions that produce a physical predisposition to a cancer's development. Although some have categorized such ailments as "lifestyle diseases," the quality of air, drinking water, and soil are environmental factors that are affected by the behavior of entire communities rather than by single individuals.

Preventive health actions are always—especially in the long run—more effective than other types of health actions. For more than a decade, the World Health Organization (WHO), the public health arm of the United Nations, has been trying to develop an integrated approach to the prevention of certain noncommunicable diseases through early detection and treatment. It makes sense to screen populations for all those diseases that affect people in the second half of their lives, using an integrated system of diagnosis and treatment. Such systems would invariably protect the health of certain groups within an overall population, not only through disease detection at early stages of development but by continued monitoring of specific groups in order to formulate plans for the most appropriate approaches to prophylactic and treatment measures. At the same time, such systems would neutralize the effect of the causative factors for these relatively common diseases.

**SOURCE:** Dr. Nikolai Napolkov, WHO Assistant Director, *World Health Magazine*, #2, 1995

## 1995 World Health Report

The 1995 *World Health Report* covers almost every nation and territory around the world, publishing tables, charts, maps, and graphs on such indicators as death rates, life expectancy, infant mortality, population, fertility rates, adult literacy, and health expenditures per capita. This year, extreme poverty is identified as the world's primary killer of individuals, and the main cause of ill health and suffering. Other conclusions published in the report include:

- life expectancy in one least-developed nation is 43 years, contrasted with 78 years among industrialized nations.
- each year over 12 million developing-economy children under the age of five die, mostly from preventable causes.
- over 20 million women undergo unsafe abortions each year, killing more than 70,000 of them.
- 99% of deaths due to communicable diseases from maternal, perinatal, and neonatal causes occur in the developing world.
- half the world's population still lacks regular access to treatment for common diseases.

**SOURCE:** *World Health Report*, 1995.



**Every individual in the world should have access to a minimum of essential health care.**

**SOURCE:** *World Health Magazine*, #2, 1995

# Chernobyl Update

Two Soviet-built RBKM reactors continue to operate at Chernobyl, one in a building adjacent to the shoddily housed remains of the 1986 explosion. Ukraine's entrenched nuclear bureaucracy and a desperate need for energy and employment have made the Ukrainian government

resistant to closing the plant, despite experts' predictions of further disaster.

In April of 1995, in response to mounting pressure from the international nuclear power community and environmentalists worldwide, Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma announced a commitment

to completely close Chernobyl by the year 2000. One month later, the Ukrainian government signed an agreement with a consortium of Western power companies to replace the station with a new gas-powered plant. But that arrangement still has the potential of falling by the wayside, and Chernobyl continues to be a disaster site.

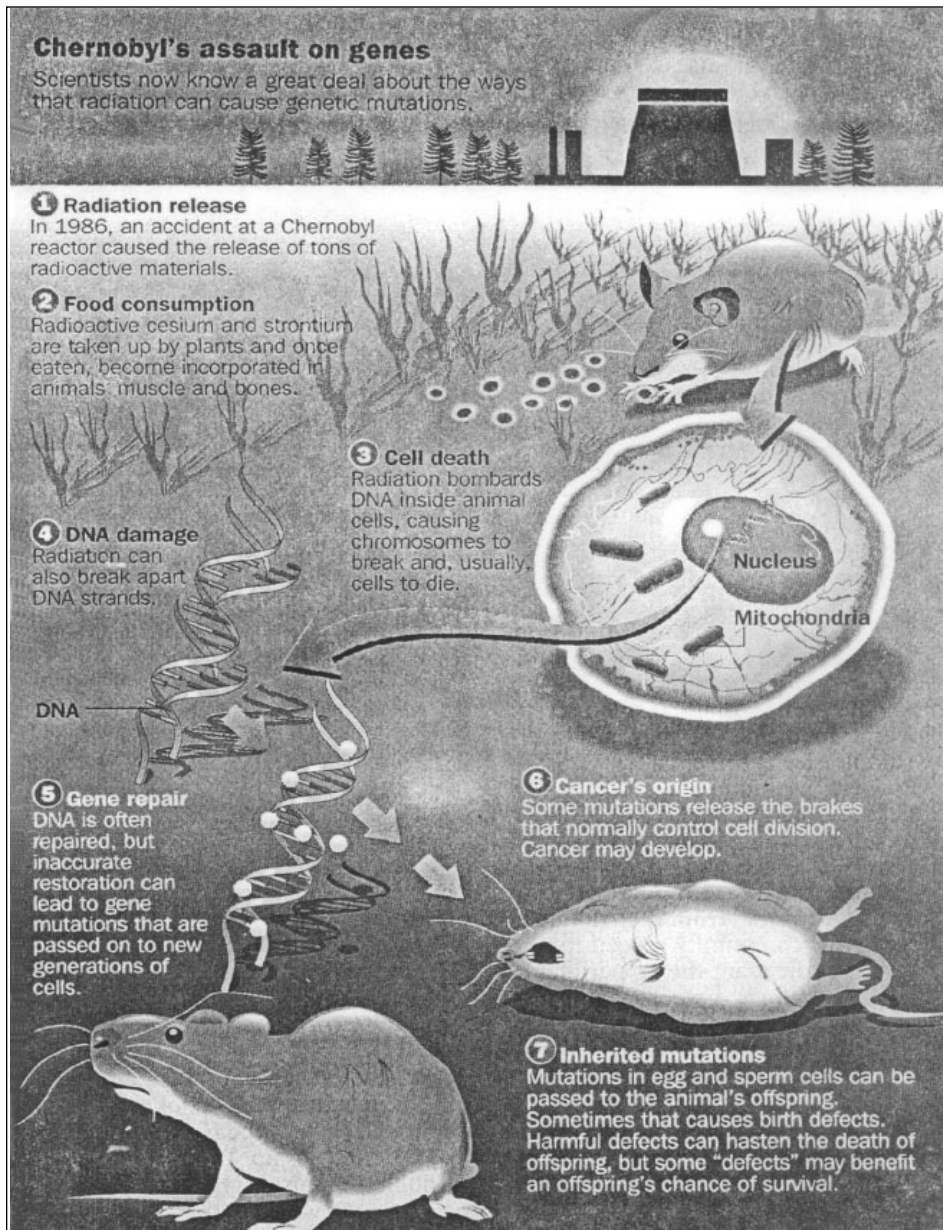
Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, parts, money, and qualified personnel have become increasingly scarce among all of the remaining Soviet-built reactors. The reactors are aging and they continue to operate without accepted industry standards for safety and maintenance.

Who will pay the four billion dollars Ukrainian officials say they need to get Chernobyl related projects—the safe closing of existing facilities and the start up of new energy sources—remains an unanswered question. The World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are evaluating Ukraine's energy needs, and are expected to release a new aid package sometime in late 1995.

The environmental legacy of the 1986 explosion remains under scientific evaluation and study. While no one disputes that the meltdown ten years ago was the worst nuclear disaster in human history, it has provided scientists with a unique opportunity to study how flora and fauna adapt to extremes of radioactive contamination and pollution.

Researchers affiliated with the Savannah (Georgia) River Ecology Laboratory in the United States have for two years been studying Ukraine's wildlife. Startling evidence has recently been released regarding the impact of excessive radiation on several forms of life. The degree of evolutionary change in some animal species since the disaster has been greater than would normally occur in over ten million years, scientists report.

Field mice around Chernobyl are adapting and evolving in unprecedented ways, and evolutionary toxicologists disagree on how their adaptation to extreme radioactivity is affecting their genetic life patterns. According to a report released by the Society for the Study of Evolution, humans are deflecting the normal path of evolution, and 200 years from now we may be living with organisms that are



Scientists studying mutations in field mice in Ukraine and Bellarussia report that their rate of genetic change has increased from one mutation every 10,000 years to one mutation every 100 years.

SOURCE: US News & World Report, 7/17/95



***Soviet-built RBMK nuclear reactors like the one that exploded at Chernobyl still dot the post-Soviet era eastern European landscape, although the infrastructure no longer exists to maintain them according to accepted world safety standards.***

***SOURCE: New York Times***

genetically quite different from the way they are today.

Today, much of the original radioactivity has disappeared. Contaminants with short half-lives like radioiodine have completely decayed, and longer-lived ones like plutonium, radiocesium, radiostrontium have settled deep within Ukrainian soils. High surface radioactivity remains in patches, and contaminants continue to circulate within the food chain. Mushrooms and berries set Geiger counters screaming, and boars, deer, and mice captured within radioactive zones have accumulated radiocesium in their bone marrow and muscle tissue.

Yet, the abundance of wildlife in the Ukraine remains puzzling to scientists, considering what is currently known or suspected about the biological effects of radiation contamination. High-tech probing of animal cells challenges the conventional wisdom that animals are unable to tolerate high rates of genetic change and mutation. Extensive studies from Hiroshima and Cold War laboratories have shown that radiation breaks chromosomes and the DNA strands in the double helix. Usually, this is the signal for a cell or group of cells to collapse and die, or at least to attempt to repair themselves by enlisting repair enzymes to restore the genetic coding. While Chernobyl mice don't look like mutants at face value, they do have many

breaks in their DNA strands and an extremely high mutation rate.

During mammalian evolution, the rate of spontaneous mutation of one letter in the genetic code has been estimated at one in a billion per generation. But at Chernobyl, the mutation rate in the cytochrome b gene, for example, is currently one in ten thousand. Can rapid mutation also occur throughout the genetic sequence? According to one scientist, if that kind of high mutation rate can be tolerated across the entire genome it would indicate that mammals in particular are considerably more resilient than anyone would have guessed.

The genetic impact of Chernobyl is far from completely understood. People from the region have paid an extraordinarily high price, as cancer rates and other health disorders related to genetic cell mutation continue to climb. A study of thyroid cancer in Ukrainian children, reported in the Spring *World Ecology Report*, shows rises in incidents of up to 30 times normal levels. Higher rates of spontaneous abortion and birth defects have been consistently documented among Ukrainian and Belarussian health facilities, and increases in leukemia and other cancers continue to be reported.

***SOURCE: US News & World Report, 7/17/95; World Health Magazine, #2, 1995.***

## The Fall-Out from Chernobyl

WHO's international programme on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident (IPHECA) is looking into a very wide range of medical issues resulting directly or indirectly from the immense radioactive contamination which followed a fire at the Chernobyl nuclear plant near Kiev in April 1986. Its general purpose is to limit the damage to health, obtain reliable scientific information on that damage, and to draw conclusions that will lead to better medical preparedness for any future radiation accident.

Given the acute nature of the medical problems and the limited resources available in heavily contaminated areas of the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, five of the most urgent pilot projects have been running since 1991. They are designed to show up the diseases caused by radiation and to concentrate on children and adolescents, the most vulnerable in population. They involve mainly thyroid cancer and thyroid disorders (the "thyroid gland" project), diseases of the haematopoietic and lymphatic systems (the "haematology" project), and mental retardation and other brain dysfunctions in children who were exposed to radiation *in utero* (the "*in utero* brain damage" project).

Cancer is the most serious of the thyroid disorders reported. Since the accident, 653 cases of thyroid cancer have been diagnosed in children and adolescents: 350 in Belarus, 259 in Ukraine and 44 in Russia (Bryansk region only). Unfortunately, more cases of thyroid cancer are being discovered as time goes on. The tumours take an aggressive course, with early metastasis to the regional lymph nodes and the lungs. All the sick children have had thorough medical examination and treatment in special centres at home and abroad, and are under systematic observation.

So far no increase in the number of cases of leukaemia and lymphoma in the most affected areas has been detected, but there has been a significant increase in the number of non-Hodgkins lymphomas, multiple myeloma and chronic lymphoid leukaemia among older people, especially those over 60.

To detect cases of mental retardation and other possible brain dysfunctions in children exposed to radiation *in utero* following the Chernobyl accident, 2,189 children from the contaminated territories of the three countries were examined. Some of them were found to have significant retardation of intellectual and mental development, and also behavioural and emotional disorders.

***SOURCE: Anatoly F. Tsyb, Victor M. Ponomarenko, and Guntis Ozolins, World Health Magazine, #2, 1995***





## GOOD NEWS

■ For the first time since the Global Climate Treaty was signed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, a formal process has been initiated that could significantly reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. At this year's meeting of all the nations that signed the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, delegates adopted a mandate to negotiate a binding agreement limiting all greenhouse gas emissions from industry by 1997.

**SOURCE:** *Environmental Defense Fund News*, 8/95.

■ The United Nations Commission on Population and Development (UNCPD) has the primary responsibility for reviewing the follow-up and implementation of the Int'l Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. According to Executive Director of the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) Dr. Nafis Sadik, "The Programme of Action adopted in Cairo clearly recognized the need to empower women both as an important end in itself and as a key to improving families, communities, and countries." During mid-1994, world population stood at 5.63 billion, and was projected to increase by 87 million over the next 12 months. Currently, 4.47 billion people, constituting 79% of the world's population, live in less-developed regions.

**SOURCE:** *UNFPA News*, 8/95.

■ In one of the most significant environmental decisions in the past 22 years, the United States Supreme Court ruled in June that the Endangered Species Act not only protects an animal's life but prevents the destruction of its habitat. David Wilcove, an ecologist at the Environmental Defense Fund, says bridges must be built between the environmental and business communi-

ties, and Congress must include economic incentives in its endangered species legislation, especially providing for tax breaks to property owners who are environmentally responsible.

**SOURCE:** *Boston Globe*, 6/30/95.

■ Many of Brazil's indigenous peoples organizations have formed a collective affiliation called the Rio Negro Federation of Indigenous Organizations, headquartered in Sao Gabriel de Cochoeira. By uniting, the Organization hopes to increase its political and economic power through strengthened, collective voting and purchasing. Brazil's wealth of natural resources, on which indigenous populations rely for subsistence and shelter, have been increasingly exploited by multinational business interests and regional government bodies. The Brazilian government has agreed to consult with indigenous tribes on present and future land distribution issues.

**SOURCE:** *Washington Post*, 8/12/95.

■ During the past two years, demand for recycled products in the United States has caught up with and even surpassed supply. The most dramatic increase has come in the reusable paper market, which accounts for 38% of the solid waste stream. Between 1990 and 1994, more than 85 new paper mills using recycling technology were built in the United States alone. Today, many companies are eager to acquire as much used paper as possible. Weyerhaeuser, one of the world's largest paper products manufacturers, is currently offering municipalities 20-year guaranteed contracts to remove all the paper they can provide.

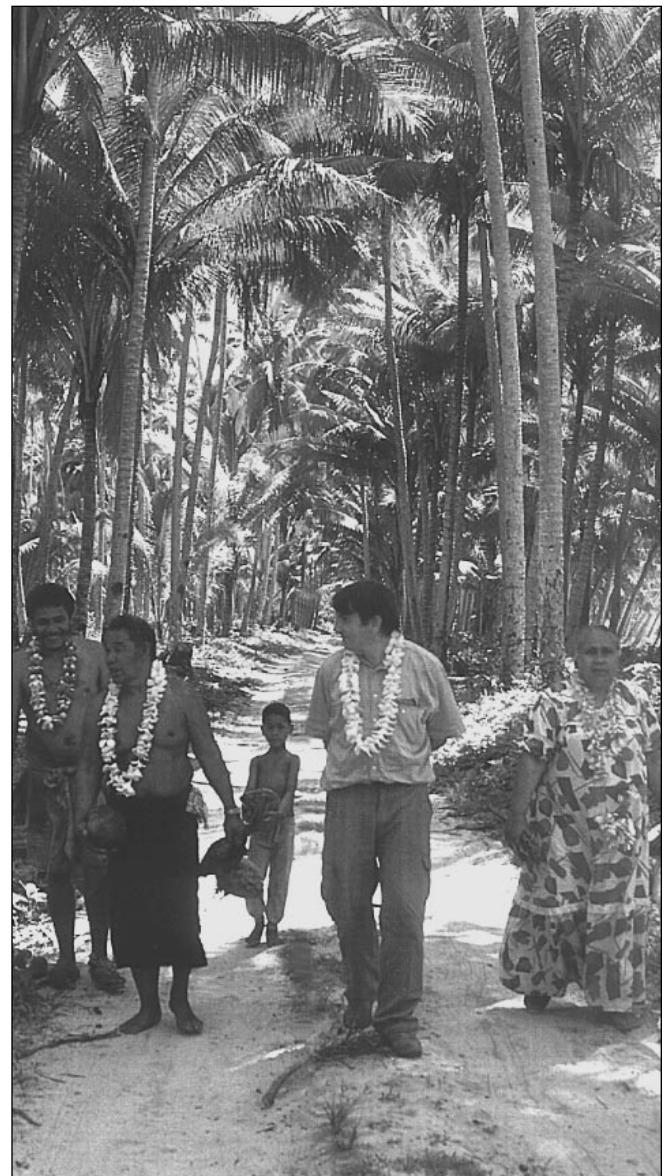
**SOURCE:** *US News & World Report*, 7/17/95.

■ The government of Turkey has upgraded its public health system, extending its agreement

with the United Nations Office for Project Services to carry out the country's first health project aimed at upgrading the system among seven provinces. According to the U.N. Development Program, the program's extension, which began more than three years ago, will encourage further support to a major reform effort designed to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of health care delivery and financing. It will also ensure the continuation of institution-building efforts.

**SOURCE:** *UNDP Update*, 1/95.

■ Several nations this year have achieved unprecedented falls in fertility, halving average family sizes in one genera-



**Samoan traditional healers share the secrets of the rain forest.**

**SOURCE:** *World Development*, September 1991





**Industrial use of recycled products is on the upswing, especially in the United States. Expansion of world markets is rapidly becoming a priority for many corporate enterprises.**

SOURCE: US News & World Report, 7/17/95

tion. Among them are some of the developing world's most populous nations: Brazil, Mexico, and Thailand. It is now widely acknowledged that the education of girls is one of the most crucial factors in slowing global population growth. Overall, about a third of the developing world's children fail to complete even four grades, the majority of which are girls.

SOURCE: Int'l Dateline: Population Communications, Jul/Aug '95.

■ The World Bank has embarked upon an initiative to provide \$200 million to lending institutions that focus on grassroots businesses, especially those involving women entrepreneurs. "Micro-loans" as they are called have proven successful in many instances, notably in the case of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, where small scale lending to women sometimes consisting of only \$100, have resulted in extremely high repayment rates, often exceeding 98 percent. The loans are made without collateral and focus on promoting self-employment.

SOURCE: World Bank News

**"Don't allow yourself to be trapped by the constraints of your past; don't allow yourself to become overly attached to any authority; don't hold on to what you don't need; don't avoid confrontation; and don't forget your spirit of childhood curiosity."**

—Dr. Leo Esaki,  
Nobel Prize winning physicist, 1973

## BIODIVERSITY PATENTS: A New Approach to Resource Extraction

A new approach to traditional raw materials extraction processes is replacing an old model for biodiversity prospecting and extraction. Under a new "partnership model," no natural products are removed from their country of origin. Instead, biotechnology and technological know-how—especially among the international pharmaceutical industries—are transferred directly to the developing world.

According to Edgar Asebey, President and CEO of Andes Pharmaceuticals Inc. based in Bolivia, the search for new and better medical products has traditionally viewed environmental resources in other parts of the world as fair game. Multinational corporations have generated billions of dollars in revenue through removal of raw materials, scientific study, product development, and commercial exploitation. Traditionally, no economic, social, or health benefits have been realized among populations who reside in those locations from which raw materials were extracted.

The most effective mechanism for this new trend has been the development of patent law for environmental resources located only in certain parts of the world.

Seventy percent of all plants known to have anti-tumor properties, for example, are located only in rainforests. Of an estimated 60,000 plant species in the Amazon, only about 500 have ever been chemically studied, and 90% have yet to undergo even rudimentary analysis.

New patent laws are expected to not only increase the availability of plant materials to scientific analysis, but to transfer institutional mechanisms designed to undertake such analysis directly to areas where the natural resources are located. The new model will generate sources of revenue among impoverished and economically underdeveloped regions, place renewed emphasis on the conservation of biological diversity among threatened resource bases, encourage cooperation between international governments and multinational corporations and local communities, and advance the scientific exploration of medical products development.

SOURCE: World Information Transfer's 4th Conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions. United Nations Headquarters, New York, NY, June 8&9, 1995.



**Literacy has been one of the most dramatic gains in the status of women during the past two decades.**

SOURCE: First Call for Children, July-September 1993



## DID YOU KNOW?

■ Researchers have definitely established a subarctic warming using the forest trees as barometers. They found throughout the 20th century a definite northward movement of the northernmost limit for pine trees in Finland. The Global Treeline Project has been working on this problem since the 1950s, and they have observed over half a century of coniferous treeline movement.

**SOURCE:** *Global Warming Int'l Center, 1995.*

■ 500,000 women die each year from pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortions. Most of these deaths could be prevented by suitable medical care. An estimated 120 million women around the world want to limit or delay childbirths, but lack appropriate information to do so, as well as the physical means and social support. In some world areas, as many as 30% of female populations are infected with HIV.

**SOURCE:** *EarthAction, Sept. 1995.*

■ A recent study of the records of over 4,000 male births performed in Copenhagen found that poor social conditions, especially economically underprivileged young and unwed mothers, contributed significantly to producing criminal and sociopathic behavior by age 19. Another important factor was determined to be emotional rejection, such as can result from unwanted pregnancies and the institutionalization of infants. The authors of the research suggest that disruption of the mother-infant bond leads directly to callous affectionless, unempathetic individuals. Birthing complications, common among young, underprivileged, pregnant women, may affect the developing brain, impairing a child's control of explosive impulses.

**SOURCE:** *Psychiatrist's Clinical Update, 6/95.*

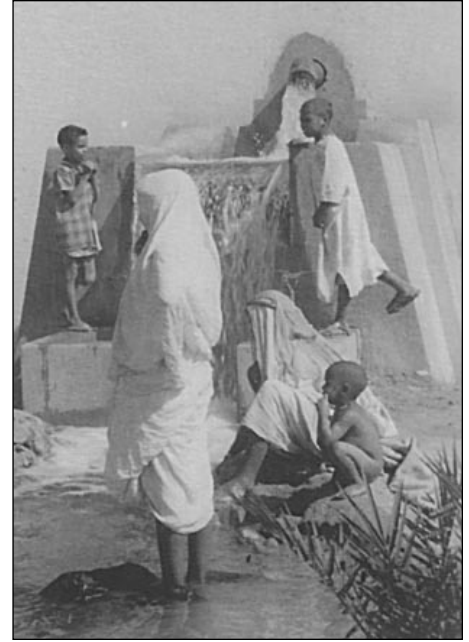
■ Amounts of protective ozone over the northern hemisphere set record lows above some arctic areas last winter, but did not dip far enough to qualify as a hole in the ozone layer. Over North America, including the United States, concentrations of atmospheric ozone fell below normal levels. Natural weather patterns and pollution are believed to be responsible.

**SOURCE:** *Science News, 5/6/95.*

■ Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology in Hamburg found that there exists only a 1-in-20 chance that temperatures rose during the 20th century because of natural conditions. Other researchers, who are less certain that human forces caused Earth's atmosphere to warm, point to the uncertainties that afflict climate studies worldwide. In the United States, a recent weather study conducted at the National Climatic Data Center found that precipitation and temperature have reached extremes 1.5% more often since 1976 than over the past 65 years. This pattern fits predictions of a greenhouse world to the degree that it is statistically likely that the greenhouse gases emitted from human activity are causing climate change. However, other contributing causes remain possible, if unlikely.

**SOURCE:** *Science News, 6/10/95.*

■ An environmentally unfriendly United States Congress is currently engaged in a concerted effort to roll back two decades of legislation designed to protect and conserve America's natural resource base. In July, Congress voted to suspend the rule of



**Deforestation threatens the water supply.**

**SOURCE:** *Unesco Sources, April 1995*

law on millions of acres of the public domain, especially protected wild and natural forest lands. Known as the Rescission Act, such efforts constitute the first in what will most likely prove to be a salvo of attempts over the next several years to deprive ordinary citizens of their natural resource heritage in favor of economic exploitation.

**SOURCE:** *SaveForests, 7/23/95.*



**SOURCE:** *First Call for Children, July-September 1995*

■ According to the World Bank, a global potable water crisis looms in the immediate future. Bank analysts project an estimated \$600 million will have to be spent to augment existing water sources, as demand spurred by urbanization and agriculture outstrips available supplies. While water is plentiful in many parts of the world, some 80 nations are currently experiencing acute shortages.

**SOURCE:** World Bank, *World Development Report, 1995.*

■ *Agenda 21*, the plan of action document signed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, has significantly transformed national policy-making for sustainable development. Unfortunately, industrialized, economically privileged nations are backsliding on their agreed upon commitments, yet the overall process for environmental resources conservation is advancing.

**SOURCE:** *UNDP, 4/18/95.*

■ The United Nations estimates that, in addition to the more than 100 million land mines already planted in some 64 countries, between 2-5 million more are laid each year. The International Red Cross reports that each month land mines kill over 800 people and severely maim thousands more. Problems associated with land mines have become so severe that the U.N.'s Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) has been designated to establish a system-wide mechanism for clearance and response to health risks.

**SOURCE:** *UN Int'l News, 7/95.*

■ A 2-cent solution of vitamin A can save the lives of millions of children, yet only 35 nations supply the programs necessary for its distribution. Over 200 million children under the age of five suffer from vitamin A deficiencies, which cause blindness and death as well as immune system impairment. Of the estimated 13 million global child deaths each year, about half are caused by pneumonia, diarrhea, and measles.

**SOURCE:** *UNICEF, 6/8/95.*

■ The lack of dietary iodine which affects large areas of Asia and Africa is one of the most calamitous and least-known health problems in the world today. Lack of iodine has condemned millions of people to cretinism, tens of millions to retardation, and hundreds of millions to milder degrees of physical and mental impairment. In total, about 1.6 billion people in over 100 nations are currently at

risk. One solution is to iodize all salt at a cost of about five cents per person per year. Although at the beginning of the 1990s most affected countries agreed to iodize at least 90% of edible salt by 1995, only about 50 nations have a realistic chance of attaining that goal.

**SOURCE:** *UNICEF, 6/8/95.*

■ According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) population pressures and unsustainable logging practices could make the Philippines the first Asian nation to lose all of its naturally forested land by the year 2000.

**SOURCE:** *UNDP Update, 6/5/95.*

■ Chlordane, a highly toxic termite control pesticide, causes lingering neurotoxicity among exposed humans, as well as brain damage, asthma, hair loss, seizures, and other health impairments.

**SOURCE:** *Science News, 7/95.*

■ The annual depletion of ozone high over Antarctica has steadily worsened over the past ten years and has reached the most severe levels possible. According to scientist Jonathan Shanklin, a co-discoverer of atmospheric ozone depletion, the situation has not slowed at all and, if anything, has accelerated. Ozone is a form of oxygen that shields harmful ultra-violet rays generated by the sun. The depletion of this important atmospheric layer is caused chiefly by pollution.

**SOURCE:** *Associated Press, 8/30/95.*

■ Mount Mitchell used to be known as "Black Dome" for its dense cover of virgin evergreens. It's now, to quote the venerable Encyclopaedia Britannica, "*a ghost forest of dead trees.*" Acid rain and air pollution have deepened the scars left by environmental mismanagement in one of the world's most biologically diverse temperate regions—the Southern Appalachian Mountains in the United States.

**SOURCE:** *UNESCO Sources, #69, 1995*

***"There can be no social development or sustained economic growth without health. We must look beyond our short-term policies which provide minimal safety nets only, or we run the risk of helping poverty become institutionalized."***

—Hiroshi Nakajima,  
World Health Organization (WHO)  
Director-General

## Let There Be Light!

***Solar energy could solve the energy problems of Africa's rural populations—and help protect the environment.***

Seventy-five percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population has no access to electricity. Energy sources are taken directly from the surrounding environment, and that usually means cutting down trees in regions that already suffer severe environmental degradation.

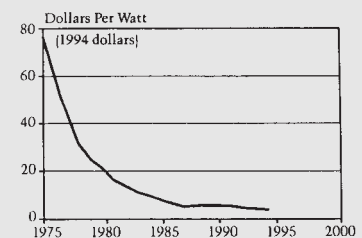
With energy consumption relatively low in rural areas, it is considered economically unwise to extend electricity supply to them. However, Sub-Saharan Africa's population is expected to double within the next 35 years, and most of this growth will take place in rural zones—already home to 70% of the continents' peoples.

"We use the sun every day to help us see and to keep us warm, but it is largely forgotten when it comes to every day energy needs," said one of the African experts. "Few national policy makers are taking advantage of this unlimited and free source of energy that, unlike conventional fuels such as coal and oil, belongs to everybody."

A viable alternative

Zimbabwe is one of the few African countries that have embarked on projects to exploit the sun to provide energy in rural areas. The government, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 1993 launched a nine-million dollar five-year Global Environmental Facility (GEF) solar energy pilot project which will see 10,000 to 20,000 solar installations mounted in rural homes, schools and hospitals.

**SOURCE:** *UNESCO Sources, #69, May 1995*



**Average Factory Price for Photovoltaic Modules, 1975-94**

**SOURCE:** *Vital Signs, 1995 Worldwatch*



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT: *On the Road to Peace & Prosperity*

The year 1995 will probably go down in history as the 20th century's most significant year for celebrations and commemorations. The United Nations' 50th Anniversary and the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II, in both Europe and Japan, head the list of occasions that call for celebrating and rejoicing. Grief and sorrow, on the other hand, characterize commemorations of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, notwithstanding claims of justification in the latter cases.

For nearly half a century, the Cold War has characterized relations between the two superpowers and their allies in a polarized world. Every now and then, local and regional wars have raged in various parts of the world, but they have always been contained in a manner that permitted conciliation and settlement, often with United Nations involvement and leadership. Peacekeeping activities by the U.N. have evolved as a vital instrument for containing conflagrations, especially in areas where territorial disputes remain unresolved and lack of confidence and mutual distrust persist among antagonists.

Yet, the end of the Cold War has created new conditions which emphasize the importance of global, collective security. The Cold War's demise also offers a great opportunity for the emergence of a better world order, and places greater responsibilities on a rejuvenated United Nations. A U.N. Security Council Summit in 1992 called on the Secretary General to present ideas and recommendations for enhancing the U.N.'s role in strengthening world peace and security. Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali articulated his views in a well-received report entitled *An Agenda for Peace*, which analyzes and recommends ways and means of strengthening—within the framework and provisions of the U.N. Charter—the U.N.'s capacity for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping.

*An Agenda for Peace* coincided with a significant increase in U.N. peacekeeping operations worldwide. During the preceding four years, the U.N. had established as many such operations as it had during the four previous decades combined. By mid-1992, some 45,000 soldiers and civilian police forces were serving among U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world. That number more than doubled in the following three years with the rapid expansion of U.N. operations in Somalia, the

former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. The nature of U.N. peacekeeping operations also changed significantly, as it came to include diplomatic peacemaking along with its enforcement measures. Such additional U.N. involvements, mandated by the Security Council, represent the international community's response to a number of global emergencies that came in rapid succession, allowing little time for adequate preparation and response.

The rise of "micro-nationalism" and ethnic assertion, coupled with the ruthless pursuit of power and selfish interests, has posed great challenges for the United Nations. Among such nations as Liberia, Angola, and especially Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, efforts to restore peace and civil order met with tremendous obstacles, as combatants suffered no shortage of weapons or economic support from external parties. The international community, represented by the United Nations, has been challenged as never before. This has inevitably resulted in certain setbacks, setbacks which should be blamed on a lack of international political will rather than on the United Nations as a peacekeeping entity.

This must lead to the realization that only genuine disarmament in a systematic and equitable fashion will make peaceful conflict on a global scale possible. This certainly applies to ongoing national and intrastate conflicts. With increased means to impose mutually favorable terms on combatting parties, antagonists can be more readily persuaded to negotiate disputes and arrive at peaceful settlements.

Peace through disarmament also provides great social and economic benefits. In the developing world, savings from arms expenditures will free up immense resources for investment in badly needed economic and social development. Industrial nations must surely realize tremendous savings, which will in turn make possible greater internal development, as well as more generous assistance to developing economies. According to the 1995 *Human Development Report*, world military expenditures in 1992 totaled \$521,820 million, of which \$136,010 million came from developing nations. This accounted for 60% of the combined education and health expenditures of developing nations and 33% of industrial nations.

**SOURCE:** Farouk Mawlawi, U.N. Senior Advisor, Habitat, Executive Vice Chair WIT.

### A New Alliance

*What role for the military in a world where the concept of national security is profoundly changing?*

This question was at the heart of a two-day symposium set up by UNESCO and the Organization of American States (OAS) at the Inter-American Defense College (IADC) in Washington, DC, that explored what constitutes security in the post Cold War world. The IADC is a college for senior officers from North America, Latin America and the Caribbean that studies inter-American defense issues.

"Democracy is the only way to build peace," said Director-General Federico Mayor, in stressing to the military officers that UNESCO seeks to create "a new alliance" with them against "intolerance and violence. The biggest victory is not to win a war but to prevent one."

One of the key points of the symposium was that major threats to security now come from within countries in the form of illiteracy, poverty, joblessness, environmental degradation and social exclusion, which are in turn breeding grounds for crime, terrorism, drug-trafficking, and political radicalization. And the deep-rooted causes of social conflict do not lend themselves to military solutions. Rwanda, Somalia and former Yugoslavia were often cited as examples of this.

Democracy is still a fragile sapling in much of the Americas, where the relationship between the military and the civil society is very much in transition. And though it was not stated outright, the political indoctrination of the Latin American military in the importance of upholding democracy and accepting civilian authority was one of the symposium's main purposes.

UNESCO has embarked on a significant and necessary mission—one where in its role as the intellectual arm of the UN system, it will have a lot to offer just by bringing civil-military relations into the international arena and opening the way for a new, joint approach to the issue of global security.

**SOURCE:** Andrew Radolph, UNESCO #69, 1995.

***"There is no formal system for disease surveillance on a global scale, yet we will have to deal with some of the consequences of climate change; for example, ebola virus or the resurgence of tuberculosis right now today."***

—Vice President Albert Gore, Conference of Human Health & Global Change, September 11, 1995, Washington, D.C.

## Voices of the Planet

■ WIT has successfully engineered the delivery of over 2,000 pounds of clothing, toys, and educational and medical supplies to two orphanages near the Children's Specialized Hospital for victims of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe. All donated items were given by WIT members, and delivered by WIT regional staff in the Ukraine. The shipment was part of the container supplied by the Children of Chernobyl Relief Fund. Other shipments are planned for victims of environmental disasters around the world. **Contact:** World Information Transfer, 866 Third Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10022.

■ An updated one-hour long videotape of all the WIT Health and Environment Conferences will soon be available for a special price of \$24. When ordering please specify NSTC or PAL. **Contact:** World Information Transfer, 866 Third Avenue, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10022.

■ GreenCOM, the Environmental Education and Communication Project of the U.S. Agency for International Development, is operating an information exchange center accessible to environmental educators and communicators among developing nations. The project is accessible by mail, fax, and e-mail, and currently acts as repository for more than 4,000 publications, curricula, newsletters, brochures, posters, videos, and other materials on environmental education and communication. The Center is actively looking for new information, and welcomes all materials donations. The Center provides bibliographies, articles, xeroxes, and further contact information. Make information requests as specific as possible. **Contact:** GreenCOM Information Exchange Center, 1255 23rd St. NW, Washington, DC, 20037 USA; Fax 202-884-8997; e-mail <greencom@aed.org>

■ Organized by Tufts University's Center for Agriculture, Food, and Environment, an upcoming conference on Environmental Enhancement through Agriculture will focus on ways that agricultural practices may be employed toward actively helping the environment, rather than merely reducing the damage agricultural practices currently cause. Two WIT members will be participating in this conference. **Contact:** Environmental Enhancement Conference,

Henry Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, 9200 Edmonston Road, Suite 117, Greenbelt, MD, USA 20770; telephone 617277-1200; fax 617-734-6991.

■ In Durban, South Africa, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) recently co-sponsored a conference on ecotourism in southern Africa with regional governments and the World Bank. **Contact:** International Association for Impact Assessment; telephone 254-262-1234; fax 254-222-6886; internet hussein.Abaza@unep.no or John Raimondo, South Africa Chapter of IAIA; telephone 27-21-650-2886; fax 27-21-650-3791; internet raimondo@ct-pop.iaccess.za.

■ The United Nations "Home Page" has been launched on the World Wide Web, allowing public access to the latest U.N. news, especially documents generated by the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The new system allows information to be disseminated more quickly than in the past, and reaches a far greater number of interested people and organizations. The Home Page address is: <http://www.un.org>.

■ The Society for Occupational and Environmental Health (SOEH) annual conference "Advances in Medical Surveillance for Environmental and Occupational Health: From Exposure Onset through Health Outcome" will be held December 6-8 in Bethesda, MD. For additional information please contact the SOEH National Office, 6728 Old McLean Village Drive, McLean, VA 22101, Phone 703-556-9222, Fax 703-556-8729.

■ The Third Annual World Bank Conference on Effective Financing of Environmentally Sustainable Development will be held in Washington, DC on October 4-6, 1995. To register, please call 203-473-9361, Fax 202-522-3244.

■ "Culture and Agriculture" is the 1995 theme of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) and title of a recently released booklet. Based on the experiences of inter-governmental organizations, notably the Food and Agriculture Organization, the booklet's 12 articles analyse past projects in trying to infuse agricultural development policies with a healthy respect for cultural practices. From educational comic strips to sacred groves,



**The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank have assisted with the formulation of sustainable forestry action plans in 90 countries.**

**SOURCE:** UN Photo 107154/GT

a wide range of tactics is offered to enable local communities to take an active part in development projects.

■ *Dismantling the Bomb and Managing the Nuclear Materials.* Washington, DC: Office of Technology Assessment, 1993.

The Cold War's demise has posed an international question unprecedented in world history: What do we do with all these devastatingly destructive nuclear weapons? Current United States federal efforts to answer this question are adequate for present and immediate contingencies, but they are insufficient to address the challenge on any kind of long-term basis. This book provides the scientific and organizational background material needed to substantiate its call for a focused, top-level government effort to develop a comprehensive national disarmament and nuclear materials management policy.

Among the report's most significant insights is that decision-making processes must not only be open to public scrutiny, but must incorporate public participation in all phases of planning and development. The OTA contributors include experts on

radiology, environmental evaluation, health and life sciences, and marine and terrestrial ecosystems, as well as advisors from public interest groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. This scholarly array of advisors and contributors suggests various initiatives that Congress might consider, discusses the next stages of dismantlement and materials management, approaches solutions to the ultimate disposition of radioactive materials, and pursues ways to encourage and assist Russia in establishing appropriate practices.

The text, although marked by professionalism and scholarship, isn't too technical for the lay reader, and the narrative is accompanied by an abundance of charts, graphs, maps, and schematics that read almost as fluidly as the prose. Several appendices provide more in depth discussions of some of the more pertinent factors of nuclear waste disposal and management, and suggest areas of further study and public involvement. A highly appropriate volume for both the casual and non-casual reader.



*UNICEF has provided children the world over with sustenance during times of hardship, which for a majority of the world's children means always.*

SOURCE: UN Photo/UNICEF

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*"Why should I send my daughter to school? Who then is going to look after the babies, fetch water, clean and cook, when I go to market to sell my vegetables? Who is going to help me dig, weed and harvest?"*

—A Nigerian mother



**POINT OF VIEW** *continued from back page*

nations to allow depletion of cash-bearing natural resources, which ultimately leads—or has already led—to economic decline. At the same time in the developing world, democracy has been growing in part because of the success of U.N. development programmes. Democratic governments with U.N. support have been elected in Namibia and other African nations, and the end of apartheid in South Africa has underlined this trend. The strivings of many peoples towards democratic government among the “countries in transition” (new nations established after the collapse of the USSR) further demonstrates this important direction. It is important to remember that the U.N. itself has been organized under democratic principles.

Silently, alongside the Cold War and development between 1945 and 1995, the world's population has more than doubled. Successful U.N.-sponsored programs that decreased mortality without also decreasing fertility supported the population explosion over the past 50 years. Most of the new births have occurred in the developing world, where poverty and ill health continue to rise. The growth of populations has contributed to the erosion of local and regional natural resources, a process which spurs the need for more children to enable a poor family to survive. As locales have become more and more impoverished, many rural poor people

have relocated to urban and industrial areas. This demographic shift increases burdens on already overstretched urban resources. Gains in education and health may be lost as families no longer send some of their offspring to school.

Young nations with huge debts and soaring populations pose a special challenge to the recent trend toward democratic government. Representation in government requires two fundamental components: a literate electorate and a free press. Both require that new generations attend school, and both depend on healthy living conditions—healthy in terms of both public and environmental health.

The U.N. has been addressing deteriorating living conditions through its series of summits and major conferences over the current decade. WIT urges U.N. member nations to interpret its charter mandate as the primary, shared objective of the world's people over the next 50 years. Achieving this goal will increase democratic government, which will increase education and literacy, which will decrease population growth, and will relieve pressure on exhausted environmental resources. It is likely that the kind of international cooperation that brought the United Nations into existence and caused it to endure for half a century will enable it to bear further fruit during the 21st century.

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# POINT OF VIEW: *The United Nations:* *50 Years of Conflict, 50 Years of Development, 5.6 Billion People*

**“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights...in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security...do hereby establish...the United Nations.” *Charter of the United Nations.***

Created during World War II by the free Allied Powers, the United Nations has lived up to its *raison d’etre*. A third global war has not come to pass. U.N. success has to be appreciated in view of the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, which motivated the signatories of the U.N. Charter to establish an international forum where nations could work through their hostilities through discussion rather than arms. Sustained and ingenious Allied cooperation between 1939 and 1945 indicated that nations could indeed work together towards a common goal. Over the U.N.’s first 50 years, the Cold War shaped international policy making and debate.



***The UN comprises 187 nations, nearly every country on the planet. 1995 marks the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter.***

SOURCE: UN Photo 188955/E. Schneider

However, the Cold War never became a hot war in large part because the U.N. provided the opportunity for a battle of words rather than a battle of weapons. Considering the awesome and terribly destructive potential of the two superpowers’ nuclear arsenals, this can only be viewed as a resounding success. Without this forum for debate, there was always the possibility the United States-Soviet Bloc enmity would escalate into a worldwide nuclear holocaust.

The agencies of the U.N. have endeavored to secure peace as well in the Third or developing world—which began as colonialism—in Africa, South America, Asia, and the Middle East. Over the past 50 years—particularly through the work of UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, IAO, UNEP, and WHO—an international effort has promoted “better standards of life in larger freedom” for this large part of the globe. In much of the developing world, maternal and infant mortality have declined, water, sanitation, energy, transportation, and agricultural projects have improved health and living standards, and more schools have been constructed.

Development aid, while it has improved and saved countless lives, however, has also resulted in huge debt accumulation for many recipient nations. Unmanageable debts have prompted some

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Margaret Mead