DESERIFICATION
THE NEGLECTED ISSUE AT PREPCOM

According to many developing countries, desertification has been the neglected issue on the UNCED agenda. Due to problems with document availability at PrePCOM III and a preoccupation by Working Group III participants with other issues, this agenda item has been denied critical attention. At the insistence of African countries, it was decided that Working Group I would put this issue at the top of its agenda at PrePCOM IV.

At PrePCom III, work on this issue did not begin until the third week and discussion of PC/62 was cut short by lack of time. Many African delegates were highly critical of PC/42/Add.2 (the proposed Agenda 21 programme areas) on the basis that it was 'grossly inarticulated' and 'inadequately focused.' In addition, many African countries expressed their concern that the issue of poverty be appropriately addressed within the context of this debate and they urged that the allocation and flow of resources in desertification control must address biomass and energy problems; modification of lifestyles; and, where needed, protection of species and fragile ecosystems. The African delegations also wanted special attention on temperate deserts, where the rate of water loss in the soils is lower than in tropical deserts. They also urged that a more integrated approach be taken to the whole issue. The Germans were concerned that the problem of deserts and freshwater deterioration since the 1977 Nairobi Plan of Action was adopted, due in part to inappropriate land use and the overuse of agricultural and pastoral lands.

The compilation of government views on this issue was expressed in document W.G.L.II.29. In addition to requesting that the Secretariat present revised proposals for action on the subjects of desertification and drought, the decision requested that additional comments on these paragraphs be submitted in writing to the Secretariat by 15 September 1991.

The views of the governments expressed at PrePCom III and in writing to the Secretariat are expressed in document PC/100/Add.17, "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Combating Desertification and Drought," as well as PC/110, "Soil Protection: Desertification and Drought," a compilation on desertification and drought submitted by the Government of Tunisia, and PC/118, a report on the activities of the Sahel and Sahara Observatory.

The International Conference on Impact of Climatic Variations and Sustainable Development in Semi-Arid Regions (ICID) was held from 27 January until 1 February 1991 in Fortaleza, Brazil. This conference was organized by the Esquel Foundation of Brazil, and brought together more than 1200 scientists, politicians, economists, and NGOs, more than 200 papers, and 60 workshops and case studies were discussed.

The conference discussed many climatic, ecological, and socio-economic problems common to arid lands, with the aim of tabling a set of demands and proposals for the sustainable development of these regions which are embodied in the Declaration of Fortaleza at PrePCom IV.

The primary conference recommendations include:

- The environmentally sustainable economic and social development of semi-arid regions must be pursued as the ultimate goal, especially because the origin of poverty and environmental degradation in these areas is basically economic and political.
- Development must be understood as including the equitable distribution of wealth and access to resources, with respect for the local diversity, control of the desertification process, and prevention of the abusive use of bio-diversity. It must also include the participation of the political commitment of the civil society, social reforms, land-tenure reform and improved agricultural policies and education at the national and regional levels.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II)

Working Group II convened for the first time in PrePCom IV yesterday morning. After a brief formal session to adopt the revised agenda for the working group, the Committee of Chairs voted to extend the river countries to include the meeting into an informal session to discuss item two on the agenda -- oceans. According to the revised schedule, Working Group II will address oceans this week. Next week, discussion will focus on freshwater resources and toxic chemicals on 17 March, hazardous and radioactive waste and freshwater resources on 19 March; and hazardous wastes on 20 March.

Shaiib began the informal session by commenting that at the end of PrePCom III, the progress made in the discussion on
The day’s discussion on oceans frustrated delegates and observers alike. The slow pace of the negotiations, coupled with the constant revisiting of those issues that had been supposedly agreed upon earlier in the day, unnecessarily prolonged the discussion of the first 14 paragraphs of PC/100/Add.21. If this pace continues, it is unlikely that Working Group II will be able to complete its agenda.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY AT PRECPROM

WORKING GROUP I: The Minister of Burkina Faso will address a formal session of Working Group I at 10:00 am, and immediately afterwards the proceedings will revert to an informal session on desertification. The delegates will continue discussion of PC/100/Add.17. It is believed that the African States will propose that the PrepCom negotiate a convention on desertification ready for UNCED.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II): Discussion will continue today on PC/100/Add.21 on oceans. It is possible that the contact group established by the Chair will report back with its recommendations on the objectives and activities listed in paragraphs 8-13. Otherwise, discussion will resume with paragraph 14. Watch for the tenor of the discussion to change once delegates start to address the more contentious issues surrounding around marine living resources. It is expected that PC/113 (a note by the Secretary-General of the Conference transmitting report of the intergovernmental meeting of designated experts on land-based sources of marine degradation and coastal activities) will be available today. There is growing support to incorporate the language contained in this document into PC/100/Add.21. There is also some discussion of a possible meeting in The Hague in August to address coastal zone management issues. This may have an impact on the extent to which coastal zone management issues will be addressed here at PrepCom IV.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER (PLENARY): When discussions on the technology transfer cluster of documents continue today, it is expected that the Vice-Chair, Bjornar Utheim, will open the session with a review of proposed amendments from PC/100/Add.10 (Science for Sustainable Development). These amendments are relatively few and non-contentious. Discussion on proposed amendments to PC/100/Add.9 (technology transfer), are expected to be more controversial, although it appears that the United States does not have serious problems with many of the amendments proposed by the G-77.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES (PLENARY): John Bell, Vice-Chair of the Financial Resources informal sessions has been conducting private consultations with the heads of the regional groups. By late afternoon, it is probable that he will privately circulate copies of the text to be negotiated at Wednesday’s informal-informal session.

SCHEDULE OF PRECPROM IV EVENTS

OFFICIAL MEETINGS

| Time     | Location | Session                                    | Open
|----------|----------|--------------------------------------------|-----
| March 10 | 10:00 am | UN Conference Room 1 | Working Group I (formal followed by informal on desertification) |
| March 10 | 10:00 am | UN Conference Room 4 | Working Group II (oceans) |
| March 10 | 3:00 pm  | UN Conference Room 1 | Working Group II (oceans) |
| March 10 | 3:00 pm  | UN Conference Room 4 | Plenary (technology transfer) |

OTHER MEETINGS

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Session</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>9:00 am to 10:00 am</td>
<td>Conference Room C</td>
<td>NGO Strategy Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>10:00 am to 12:00 pm</td>
<td>AIP Hall, OIT 8th Floor</td>
<td>General Consultative Meeting</td>
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