

The Passion for Sustainable Development

By Ramesh Jaura



Joke Waller-Hunter, who took over from Michael Zammit Cutajar* as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] on May 1, is deeply committed to Sustainable Development. She has, in fact, a passion for Sustainable Development. Her first encounter with global issues related to Sustainable Development was in Stockholm in 1972, when she attended the first in a series of UN conferences on environment. She was then with the provincial government of North Holland, where she worked as environmental information officer and co-ordinator for environmental planning.

Twenty years later, as Waller-Hunter fondly recalls, she was actively involved in preparations for the UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as UNCED or the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro. She was then the deputy director for the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environmental Affairs [VROM]. She also directed strategic planning and was in-charge of preparations for the second National Environmental Policy Plan of the Netherlands. The plan envisaged an absolute decrease of 3 to 5 percent in CO₂ emissions compared to 1990.

The Earth Summit was convened to address urgent problems of environmental protection and socio-economic development. Some 100 heads of state and government signed the UNFCCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD]; endorsed the Rio Declaration and the Forest Principles; and adopted Agenda 21, a 300-page plan for achieving Sustainable Development in the 21st century. Six months after the Rio Summit, in December 1992, the UN created the Commission on Sustainable Development [CSD] to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED and to monitor and report on implementation of the Earth Summit agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels.

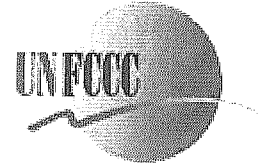
The CSD is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC], with 53 members. It was agreed that a five-year review of Earth Summit progress would be made in 1997 by the UN General Assembly meeting in special session. Earth Summit + 5: The Special Session of the General Assembly held in June 1997 adopted a comprehensive document entitled Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 prepared by the Commission on Sustainable Development. It also adopted the programme of work of the Commission for 1998-2002.

Two years after the Rio Summit, Waller-Hunter was appointed as Director of the Division of Sustainable Development, which backs the CSD. In 1998, she moved to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris. When UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed her this year as Executive Secretary of the Bonn-based UNFCCC, Waller-Hunter was serving as Director of the Environment Directorate. She is aware of the challenges she faces in her new job. "During the Convention's first decade, the centrepiece of global negotiations was to agree on the rules for its implementation," says Waller-Hunter. >>>

*Michael Zammit Cutajar, headed the Secretariat since it was set up in 1991 and retired in January 2002.

"Our challenge now is to apply those rules and to move climate change to the centre of national policy-making and action by business and civil society." In fact effective climate policies can contribute to "progress on all the issues highlighted by the UN Secretary-General – water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity – as requiring urgent action at the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg," which she will be attending together with her colleagues from other Convention Secretariats.


Climate change issues are closely linked to those of Sustainable Development. In fact, the contribution that action on climate change can make to Sustainable Development was emphasized by the Marrakesh Ministerial Declaration, adopted by the Conference of Parties to the Convention [COP] last November in Morocco as an input to the Johannesburg Summit. The Ministers called for capacity building, technology innovation and cooperation with the biodiversity and desertification conventions.

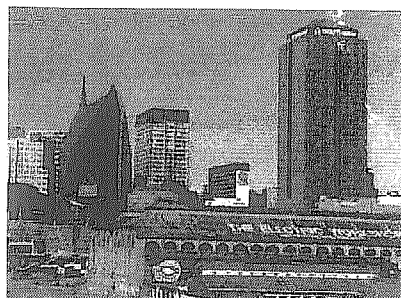


Delegates from 186 countries also discussed these and related issues June 5 to 14 in Bonn. The meetings coincided with the completion of ten years after the Climate Change Convention was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit. Discussions revealed that the Eighth Session of Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention [COP8] October 23 to November 1 in New Delhi would focus on national and international efforts to accelerate action under the Convention.

These actions will then link to new work under the Kyoto Protocol agreed five years ago in Japan. Waller-Hunter is indeed glad that the European Union and Japan ratified the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol at the June meeting's start, but it is not expected to enter into force in time for the New Delhi conference. However, the Bonn meetings prepared a number of draft decisions for adoption by the COP8 in New Delhi. For example, they agreed on guidelines for the reporting and review of national greenhouse gas inventories, a vital step for ensuring a standardized and more rigorous approach to tracking long-term emissions trends and determining whether progress is being made.

The meetings also considered the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], as contained in its Third Assessment Report published last year. Delegates discussed the relevance of these findings to their work and asked various international research programmes to provide their views on the IPCC's proposals on how to prioritize future research.

Other issues included establishing the procedures for the Executive Board of the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism and making practical arrangements for the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. Work programmes were agreed on education, training and public awareness and for the Expert Group on Technology Transfer. The Clean Development Mechanism itself is purported to assist developing countries in achieving Sustainable Development. – *Kommunikation Global* 



Johannesburg