

Demands of human beings could derail Earth Summit

by Kathleen Klenetsky

It appears increasingly likely that the U.N.'s eco-fascist extravaganza, known officially as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which is scheduled to convene in Rio de Janeiro in June, will turn out to be a flop.

At the very least, barring any major unforeseen developments, the Earth Summit will fall far short of its organizers' goal of establishing a supranational "ecological police force" that would be let loose to prevent real economic development any place in the world, under the pretext of achieving "sustainable development" and "environmental protection."

Just days before the fourth and final UNCED preparatory committee conference (Prepcom IV) opened in New York in early March, a senior figure in the British science/defense establishment warned that the Earth Summit "is becoming an absolute shambles." He said he had received a communication from the Earth Summit "convenor," Tommy Koh of Singapore, who told him "the whole thing is falling apart. There is no agenda." Koh reportedly "is willing to give it all one last go, and that's it, it's a mess." Third World backlash against the Rio summit and its malthusian agenda is intensifying, the Briton said.

That reading has thus far been borne out by events at the month-long Prepcom IV. As *EIR* went to press, the meeting remained deadlocked on several fundamental issues, with no sign that the logjam would be broken anytime soon.

What has led to the deadlock is a sharp rift between those participants, primarily from the Third World, who argue that it is impossible to clean up the environment without real economic and technological development, and those, principally representing Anglo-American financial interests, who are promoting environmentalism, with its attendant assortment of hoaxes, such as the ozone hole, as a deliberate means

to stamp out every last impulse for scientific and economic progress, with the Third World a major target.

In comments that reflected the frustration which the enviro-maniacs behind the Earth Summit are now experiencing, Amb. Harald Kreid, Austria's representative to the pre-UNCED meeting, said March 12 that the reason Prepcom IV was not going according to plan was because the developing countries had changed their position, and now wanted to change the Earth Summit's objectives "from environment to development."

Human beings come first

The Group of 77, representing 128 Third World nations, set the tenor of the debate during the opening session of Prepcom IV, when it presented a draft proposal demanding that the Earth Charter—one of the key Earth Summit documents—give top priority to the concept that "human beings are the center of environmental concerns." The statement asserted, "The quality of the environment is dependent on the satisfaction of basic human needs. Human beings should be guaranteed a healthy life, free from hunger, disease, and poverty."

The G-77 argued that economic development is an "inalienable right and therefore the development needs of all developing countries shall be treated as a matter of priority."

K. Amaratunge, chairman of Sri Lanka's Environmental Authority, emphasized that economic progress is a prerequisite, not a threat, to environmental health. "Environmental problems will be largely mitigated if the standard of living of our people is raised," he asserted. "Rather than asking us to slow down development, what [industrialized countries] should do is give us the technology so that we have refined systems of development."

That position has been reiterated by Third World representatives throughout the meeting. For example, Mourad Khelladi, secretary of state for scientific research of Algeria, told Prepcom IV March 16 that effective multilateral cooperation on environmental issues required an intensification of international cooperation for development. The imperatives for a revival of growth and development in developing countries must receive the utmost attention in all deliberations of the Rio conference, he said.

Similarly, China's chief representative to the meeting, Liu Huaqiu, told the gathering March 6 that UNCED "should discuss not only environmental issues, but also related developmental issues, especially the international economic environment which has hindered sustained economic growth of the developing countries. . . . For these countries," he said, "underdevelopment is one of the important causes for their worsening environment. For some, it is even the most fundamental cause."

In addition to hammering at the issue of economic development as a prerequisite for environmental improvement, a number of developing sector delegates have also emphasized the importance of eliminating the huge debt burden that is strangling the Third World.

During the opening days of the New York Prepcom, Argentine delegate Raul Estrada pointed out that foreign debt payments are incompatible with the Earth Summit's stated objectives of "sustainable development" and protecting the environment. "It is unimaginable that investments of any type will be made if the foreign debt is to be paid."

His concern has been raised repeatedly by other Third World representatives, including a group of Portuguese-speaking African nations, whose spokesman, Mario Cabral of Guinea-Bissau, issued a statement to Prepcom IV in mid-March calling on the industrialized countries to increase development assistance to the Third World and to write off their foreign debts.

UNCED in shambles

These questions—environment versus development, debt relief, etc.—have exacerbated existing North-South differences over issues which are formally part of the UNCED agenda. Although the official line from the preparatory meeting maintains that progress is being made, there has been no agreement reached on two major sticking points: technology transfer from the industrialized to the developing nations, and how much money the North is willing to cough up to finance various environmental projects in the Third World.

The financing issue is a major stumbling block. In his opening speech to Prepcom IV, Maurice Strong, Earth Summit secretary general, estimated it would cost \$125 billion to implement the sweeping environmental programs the summit's organizers want.

The idea that a world gripped by depression could come up with anything near that sum is ludicrous. Strong conceded

that the best that could be hoped for was a total of \$7 billion a year, but the Bush administration has said it will contribute a measly \$75 million—dismissed as a bad joke by some Third World representatives.

India's Environment Minister Kamal Nath reported March 23 that the Earth Summit might end in a fiasco, if the developed nations fail to agree to provide adequate funds to the developing countries to reduce environmental damage. "It would die a natural death. . . . It's all linked up with the funding," said Kamal Nath, who was about to leave for Tokyo for consultations on how much money the Japanese might be able to come up with.

The G-77 also opposes the U.S. position that any money the North comes up with must be channeled through the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility, which would increase the International Monetary Fund-World Bank stranglehold over financial flows to developing nations.

Bush fumbles

Ironically, the Bush administration itself is helping to torpedo the conference—despite its rabid commitment to sabotaging Third World development and slashing its population.

Due to the political exigencies of his reelection campaign, Bush has been unable to commit the United States to any significant funding of the global eco-fascist regime which the Earth Summit was supposed to endorse, nor has he been able to agree to accepting strict limits on carbon dioxide emissions—essential for completion of a global climate treaty—because of the domestic economic impact this would have. Finally, the President has not yet said whether he will attend the Rio meeting; Earth Summit organizers fear that his absence would doom the conference even before it began.

Nevertheless, the United States has taken a hard line at the meeting on all issues. William Reilly, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, threw down the gauntlet in the opening days of the Prepcom meeting, when he proposed that the Earth Charter give top billing to the "free market" and "human rights," rather than economic development, as the G-77 had demanded.

Reilly subsequently unveiled a U.S. proposal that several new provisions be added to Agenda 21, one of the two major documents that will be submitted to the Rio Earth Summit. These provisions, he said, involve the "community right to know" about "who is doing what to the environment." Such provisions could be used to set up situations in which environmentalists could use scare tactics to mobilize a local population against the construction of a chemical plant, for instance.

Though not speaking on behalf of the Bush administration, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo nevertheless reflected the administration's ongoing effort to use environmental concerns as a club against Third World population, when he called on Prepcom IV to endorse a major increase in aid to curb Third World population growth.