

In November 1987, the General Assembly of the Member Universities approved the various proposals for research programmes and full activities which are due to start shortly. Particular attention to the programmes should be paid by naturalists and ecologists of all the member countries and especially by those who live in industrialized countries. Quite often supra-national organizations are oriented towards exporting the technical capacities of the 'developing' countries in order to increase their own production while improving the developing nations' economy. By doing so, the developed countries really help the economies of developing countries, but at the same time benefit themselves from such improvements.

The programmes of the new Community here described, in the section related to natural resources, should be oriented towards producing without destroying—producing within a framework of environmental protection and conservation. Growth there should be for the developing countries and by consequence for the developed; but it must be a growth without ecodisaster.

ARISTEO RENZONI, *Professor and Dean*
Dipartimento di Biologia Ambientale
Università di Siena
53100 Siena, Italy.

The International Environmental Bureau

The International Environmental Bureau (IEB) is a specialized division of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), financed independently by industrial concerns from around the world. IEB's fundamental *objective* is to promote efficient environmental management for sustainable economic growth, and its primary *purpose* is to make available to companies everywhere the latest industrial expertise and techniques for managing environmental issues.

IEB serves as a trans-industry reference centre for environmental information on the control and abatement of pollution from industrial and commercial activity. As a non-profit entity, IEB does not charge for these information services, and indeed strives to encourage *voluntary* action by business leaders to improve their environmental

performance. While IEB attempts to respond to requests for industrial information on pollution control technology to companies world-wide, we have tentatively identified 14 developing nations for priority attention: they are Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Turkey. For more information please write to the undersigned.

ALBERT E. FRY, *Deputy Director*
International Environmental Bureau
61 Route de Chêne
CH-1208 Geneva
Switzerland.

Genetic Diversity

There can scarcely be any expression that is better understood in the scientific community and yet not understood at all outside that group, than 'Genetic Diversity'. Many laymen believe that we should conserve Nature, but few can give a rational explanation of why they feel this way. What the scientists are saying is that the conservation of Nature is, *inter alia* and perhaps preeminently, for the purpose of maintaining into the future the choices that are now available to us for resolving the unpredictable problems which we shall have to face in a world of shrinking resources and burgeoning human population. In today's world, conservation is not just altruism, but rather a matter of future survival.

The living world can be likened to an iceberg: not only is it gradually melting away, but the greater, submerged part is quite unknown to us. The tip corresponds to the fraction of living species that science has recorded: some 1.5 million. Estimates of the entire bulk vary from three to ten millions, and of this some 500,000 are 'melting away' and may be lost by the year AD 2000—just 12 years from now. All possible conservation efforts should serve to keep the rate of 'melting' to a minimum. For who knows what species are faced with extinction? Could one of them, for instance, be the only bee that can pollinate the Brazil-nut tree (*Bertholletia excelsa*) or another be a grassy weed that might have helped us to breed a disease- or drought-resistant cereal?

We can neither predict what natural products we will require in the future, nor what plants, animals, or microorganisms, can provide us with new drugs, raw materials, or foodstuffs. Conservation allows us to have still a wide

range of resources to call upon to face the changing world. For example, the qualities attributed to crop plants and livestock, such as yield and nutritional values, are rarely if ever permanent. As any farmer knows, they either 'grow out' with succeeding generations, or pests evolve new strains and so overcome resistance. Continual breeding programmes, commonly using wild plants and animals, are thus essential to maintain yields. Nature mercifully offers surprises as to how some organism can become useful to Mankind (many Algae, for instance, may become valuable sources of protein). Who knows what other raw materials or services may thus be provided from the still-vast store of Nature.

Our perceptions of Nature vary from individual to individual. A tropical forest may offer quick profit and a cheap source of wood to some, a home for beautiful butterflies for others, or a watershed complete with Nature's own pumping-station (gravity)—a natural reservoir that will ensure fresh water for all time. Should short-term gains be allowed to breed long-term problems? Increasingly, decision-makers are wrestling with these questions. Even industrialists have come to recognize that if they harvest natural resources it must be done 'sustainably', or they will in time risk putting themselves out of business.

The world has become too crowded a place, and our demands are now too heavy, to expect Mother Nature to repair all the damages done by Man. But a *World Conservation Strategy* augmented by *National Conservation Strategies* such as already exist in over 30 nations world-wide, may finally provide the balance that has been missing between what we desire and what we can take safely (sus-