



# General Assembly

PROVISIONAL

A/43/PV.35  
25 October 1988

ENGLISH

Forty-third session

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE THIRTY-FIFTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Monday, 24 October 1988, at 10 a.m.

President:

Mr. CAPUTO

(Argentina)

later:

Mr. DLAMINI (Vice-President)

(Swaziland)

- Conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind [148]
- Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections [16]  
(continued)
- (a) Election of members of the Governing Council of the United Nations  
Environment Programme: draft decision
- Organization of work

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the Official Records of the General Assembly.

Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, within one week, to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 148

CONSERVATION OF CLIMATE AS PART OF THE COMMON HERITAGE OF MANKIND

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): As members will recall, at its 3rd plenary meeting the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the General Committee, that, prior to the consideration of item 148, entitled "Conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind" by the Second Committee, the item would be introduced at a plenary meeting.

Accordingly, the item will be introduced at this meeting.

Mr. TABONE (Malta): Mr. President, although the representative of my country has already expressed our congratulations to you on your election, I am honoured to repeat them in person, knowing full well that under your guidance the work of the Assembly will go forward as it has since your election.

May I first express my very deep appreciation for the opportunity I have been given to address this plenary meeting of the General Assembly to introduce formally the item entitled "Conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind". Indeed, the holding of this plenary meeting specifically for this purpose is considered by my Government as a rare privilege which consolidates further its resolve to continue contributing, in its own limited way, to the formidable work undertaken by the United Nations in the promotion of international peace and co-operation for the well-being of mankind.

Just over 20 years ago, in 1967, Malta, a newly independent State, proposed the inclusion in the agenda of the twenty-second session of the General Assembly of an item entitled "Examination of the question of the reservation exclusively for peaceful purposes of the sea-bed and the ocean floor, and the sub-soil thereof, underlying the high seas beyond the limits of present national jurisdiction, and the use of their resources in the interest of mankind." As is well known, this initiative led to the convening of the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which culminated in the promulgation of a comprehensive constitution regulating mankind's use of the oceans - the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In 1969 Malta yet again proposed, for inclusion in the agenda of the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, an item entitled "Question of the Elderly and the Aged". The Maltese proposal was accepted and subsequently considered by the Third Committee of the General Assembly. This initiative encouraged the development of a world-wide consciousness of the problem of aging

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

which led to the adoption in 1982 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging, elaborated under the chairmanship of a Maltese representative presiding over the Committee of the Whole at the world Assembly. This year there was established in Malta the International Institute on Aging, inaugurated by the Secretary-General.

These two initiatives taken by the Government of Malta - of which, as a cabinet-member, I then had the privilege to form part - originally aroused astonishment, if not suspicion, in the minds of some delegations. It was not easy for them to understand how one of the smallest Members of the international community - only a few years after its independence - could take such initiatives single-handedly.

With respect to the 1967 initiative, one distinguished personality publicly asked if Malta was the sounding-board of another State.

It may be pertinent to reiterate what was stated at that time by Mr. Arvid Pardo, Malta's United Nations Ambassador:

"Our proposal was formulated entirely without the benefit of advice from other countries and I can categorically state that we are not a sounding-board for any State and that nobody put the Maltese Government up to it."

I have felt it necessary to recall this issue in the early stages of my address because this categorical statement of our representative in 1967 applies equally to the latest Maltese initiative concerning the "Conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind".

Malta is determined to play a constructive role in the important work which the United Nations undertakes on behalf of mankind. We are conscious that the United Nations is dependent for its effectiveness on the unreserved support of the major Powers. Nevertheless, it is our firm belief that smaller States can also validly contribute to the work and efforts carried out by the United Nations. We feel that one area where small States - like my own - can play a vital role is that

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

of ensuring that the United Nations is constantly attuned to the growing and changing needs of mankind. Smaller States, possibly because of their very size and lack of major vested interests, can and are able to react faster to the evolving problems facing the world. Thus, they can reflect the conscience of mankind freely suggesting ideas and approaches which can assist the United Nations to keep "pace with the rapidly evolving human situation around the globe", as Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar noted when inaugurating the International Institute on Aging, in Malta, established together with the United Nations. It is a role which the catalytic effects of Malta's 1967 and 1969 initiatives amply prove, for in each case they led to a major declaration adopted by universal consensus.

My Government decided to take action at this session of the General Assembly due to the urgent need to conserve climate in the interests of mankind by protecting it against negative man-made changes. We are convinced that there should be global recognition of the fundamental right of every human being to enjoy climate in a state which best sustains life. As Sir Crispin Tickell observed in his outstanding and foresighted study Climatic Change and World Affairs, "Climate is a condition of life. We are all a product of its vagaries. When it changes, so must we."

Indeed, it is widely accepted that in recent years climate has been changed by various activities of the human beings that inhabit planet Earth - some five billion of them.

These activities are seriously disturbing the balance of nature. Our attitude and approach to climate should change in such a manner as to limit or remove any adverse effects of our activities. No longer can we afford to take climate for granted, as previous generations may have done. Climatic change, particularly global warming, may threaten the very existence of life on earth. Unless urgent

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

action on a global level is taken, this change could very well lead to irreversible damage.

Increasing concentrations of so-called greenhouse gases - particularly carbon dioxide - emitted mainly through the burning of fossil fuels, are likely to produce a substantially warmer climate. These gases, whose concentration in the atmosphere is rapidly increasing, absorb more of earth's radiation and return more of it back to earth. This energy, which would otherwise escape harmlessly into space, is already increasing the earth's surface temperature.

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

If this process remains uncontrolled, the greenhouse effect - amplified through massive deforestation and changing land-use patterns - will contribute to a distressing increase in global mean temperature producing major changes in climate. It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to give an accurate and comprehensive forecast of the effects climatic change could have on life on Earth. Nevertheless, there exists, I feel, enough serious scientific evidence to suggest that certain catastrophic consequences could occur. By the middle of the next century, the Earth will, on the basis of current scientific expectations, face a rise in temperature which could have a serious impact on agriculture, water-resource management, and certain climate-sensitive socio-economic activities. The thermal expansion of sea water could adversely affect the well-being of numerous coastal communities as well as marine life.

Humanity also faces the problem of ozone layer depletion caused primarily by the emission of chlorofluorocarbons. Such emission, in certain circumstances, depletes the ozone layer - which surrounds the globe and protects it from excessive solar ultraviolet radiation - producing serious effects such as an increase in the incidence of skin cancer and cataracts, as well as a lowering of the yield of certain crops and detrimental effects on plant life. Furthermore, changes in the distribution of ozone, itself a greenhouse gas, could affect the Earth's average temperature through, for example, an increase in tropospheric ozone and a decrease in stratospheric ozone.

In the face of these and other phenomena, it is essential that action be taken on a global level to ensure that our planet remains fit to sustain life. We feel that the adoption of the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the related 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer constitute important milestones in the management of a global problem before it causes irreparable harm to human well-being.

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

No one in this Chamber or elsewhere would wish climate to be allowed to deteriorate by the hand of man beyond recuperable limits. Such a statement is perhaps appropriate in the light of recent experiences following the application of momentous discoveries in various scientific fields where eagerness to be the first in the exploitation of the benefits of such discoveries has led the world to face the tremendous difficulties of safely disposing of radioactive and toxic waste and the long-term effects of certain drugs.

It is recognized that not enough is known on the phenomena leading to climatic change and to what extent these phenomena are being affected by processes attributable to man. We also recognize that more fundamental research is needed into the areas where the geosphere - including the atmosphere, the oceans, and terrestrial habitats - interacts with the biosphere.

We are encouraged by the valuable work and research already conducted on climatic change both within and outside the United Nations system. Within the United Nations system substantial work has been carried out particularly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The World Climate Conference of 1979 and the World Climate Programme, established by the Eighth World Meteorological Congress, are important landmarks in the international effort to establish an understanding of the global climate system. We note that, whilst a number of other United Nations agencies are involved, there still does not exist effective co-ordination of all the work on climatic change undertaken within the United Nations system. However, we feel that the Consultative Meeting of Heads of United Nations bodies and organs on environmental matters last July, wherein attention was given to climatic change, is a step in the right direction. Such a consultative process should, in my view, be extended in the United Nations system to all interested agencies.



(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

We welcome the formation of an intergovernmental panel on climate change, which is due to meet in November 1988, and Malta intends to participate fully in its work.

Malta looks forward to the convening of the second World Climate Conference. This important Conference should review all aspects of the World Climate Programme with emphasis on the socio-economic benefits of climate, especially in developing States.

Valuable work has also been undertaken outside the United Nations. The International Council of Scientific Unions has been in the forefront in the scientific study of the global climate system. The Beijer Institute has held a number of very important meetings on developing policies for responding to climatic change. The Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts held, only last September, an important workshop on global climatic change. The Commonwealth has established an expert group on climatic change and sea-level rise which is due to report to Heads of Government when they meet in Kuala Lumpur in 1989. We also feel the need to refer to the 1985 Villach Conference, the Villach and Bellagio 1987 workshops on developing policies for responding to climatic change, the international conference held in Toronto last June on "The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security" and the forthcoming conference on "Climate and Development" to be held in Hamburg. Such international conferences should have a major impact on the development of our policies on climatic change and will assist in alerting public opinion in our Member States.

We are also encouraged that during the last few weeks, many delegations and eminent personalities have expressed their concern on the issue of climatic change and urged that action should accordingly be taken.

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

Nevertheless, we feel that climate is so essential to mankind that a comprehensive and effective strategy on a global level is urgently required to conserve climate in the interest of mankind. We need to ensure that, in view of the magnitude of the problem and the relatively limited resources available, current efforts being undertaken be adequately co-ordinated.

It is useful to recall the impressive and illuminating statement made by the Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chairperson of the World Commission on Environment and Development. In her view, the impact of world climatic change over the next decades:

"may be more drastic for mankind than any other challenges except for nuclear war."

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

It is precisely because the issue of climatic change is so very closely linked with the question of mankind's very survival that Malta has requested that the United Nations devise a strategy to ensure that climate is conserved in the interests of present and future generations.

We firmly believe that the doctrine of the common heritage of mankind is relevant to the problems raised by climatic change. The common-heritage concept, which dates back to the 19th century, was first proposed, on Malta's initiative, in an international forum at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. It has subsequently been incorporated in two major international instruments: the 1979 Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and other Celestial Bodies, which declares the moon and its natural resources to be the common heritage of mankind; and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which declares certain areas of the oceans and their resources to be the common heritage of mankind.

The application of relevant aspects of the common-heritage principle to climate should recognize one of climate's fundamental characteristics: climate is one of the few truly natural conditions which determine life on earth and is, therefore, an integral part of man's natural heritage. The conservation of the global climate system - which "involves the atmosphere, oceans and land surface (including vegetation) and cryosphere, all of which interact in complex ways over a wide range of time-scales" - is so essential and vital to the very existence of

life that it cannot be left to individual States unilaterally to decide what, if any, conservation measures should be taken. The fundamental human right to life and the need to conserve climate as one of the prerequisites of human life cannot be limited by political boundaries and therefore requires an international strategy which transcends State sovereignty in the interests of present and future human generations.

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

The common-heritage doctrine, which has so far been widely accepted and applied with respect to the moon and certain areas of the sea-bed, entails major proprietary and economic considerations, ensuring that mankind can participate in the benefits of the exploitation of resources in the said areas.

Through Malta's present initiative, we are now proposing the extension, with such modifications as are appropriate, of this doctrine to climate as one of the essential conditions for man's survival on earth. We recognize that this application is different from that found in the other two cases, as it entails not direct economic gain but the very survival of man himself. Climatic change is a common concern of mankind, which is a corollary of the common-heritage doctrine, requiring a conservation strategy the application of which cannot be restricted by political boundaries and must necessarily have as its primary objective the common good of mankind. In short, what Malta is today proposing is a development and an elaboration of the doctrine of the common heritage of mankind for its application to a new area - climatic change, particularly global warming.

Having outlined the situation as we see it, may I be allowed to make some proposals.

We must ensure that a balance is achieved between the short-term requirements and the future needs of mankind. The application of the principle of the common concern of mankind to climate ensures that climate is a natural resource which can be utilized by each State within its territory in the process of its social and economic development but, at the same time, it cannot be tampered with or abused at the expense and to the detriment of mankind.

As the Prime Minister of Malta, Edward Fenech Adami, has pertinently observed in his analysis of the common-heritage doctrine:

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

"The philosophy of the common heritage is against leaving things to luck and in favour of discovering and increasing order where, on the face of it, there may appear to be chaos and confusion".

Malta could hardly claim to be the first State to bring the problem of climatic change to the attention of the United Nations, for, as I have already stated, very important work within the United Nations system has already been undertaken in this respect. Malta, however, is now proposing to the General Assembly that an appropriate high-level co-ordinating mechanism - which, in my view, could well be the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - undertake immediate action with respect to an interdisciplinary review of the state of the science of climate and the phenomenon of climatic change with special emphasis on global warming and its socio-economic implications. Malta will present a concrete proposal in the form of a draft resolution, which will be submitted for consideration in the Second Committee.

Malta expects the support of every Member State in this important endeavour to conserve climate, for, as the Secretary-General has pertinently noted in his report to the current session on the work of the Organization, the state of the earth's environment, which includes climate, is

"pre-eminently a problem that should evoke a solidarity of response from all nations. It has, however, reached a stage where, without a global ethic and the necessary law, it can give rise to divisive issues with political implications." (A/43/1, p. 18)

It is our view that any strategy in respect of climatic change will have to take into account the characteristics and levels of development of the various regions of the world. Certainly we feel that there exist a number of effective measures which can be undertaken by all States. States, for instance, could be encouraged to develop policies that would promote energy conservation in order to

(Mr. Tabone, Malta)

reduce or eliminate certain human activities which have a negative or detrimental effect on climate. Certain measures will have to be adopted on a gradual basis, taking into account the requirements of sustainable development and other relevant circumstances.

Malta has tentatively initiated a process to enable, in our own small way, the development of a national consciousness on climatic change. We have acceded to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and signed the related Montreal Protocol. I have established in my Ministry an advisory committee on climatic change, under the chairmanship of my personal adviser, Mr. Attard, and the University of Malta has set up a scientific committee with appropriate terms of reference.

In the face of the magnitude and the implications of the problem of climatic change, the resources for research and action are relatively limited. We must, therefore, avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure that the said resources are applied effectively in the interests of us all. We trust that our initiative, which significantly is being launched on United Nations Day, will contribute to the realization of these objectives in the most effective manner.

Sir Crispin TICKELL (United Kingdom): We welcome the initiative taken by the Government of Malta in inscribing the issue of climate change on the agenda of this year's session of the General Assembly. It was very generous of the Maltese Foreign Minister to have referred to and quoted from my book on climate in his speech. I am only one of the many who recognize that climate change is of enormous complexity and far-reaching importance, but it is only one of the problems affecting the future health of our planet.

My Government has long been concerned about the accelerating increase in the greenhouse gases. In a recent address to the Royal Society in London, the leading British scientific institution, Mrs. Thatcher spoke of the fear that we were creating a global heat trap which could lead to climatic instability. She pointed out that an average warming effect of one degree centigrade per decade would greatly exceed the capacity of our natural habitat to cope. Such a rate of warming would cause eventual melting of glacial ice and a consequent rise in the sea level of several feet over the next century. Sir Geoffrey Howe pointed out in the general debate in the Assembly last month that the increases predicted in global temperatures could have substantial effects within the next few decades on life and human society. Even small variations would have big consequences in a crowded world.

The problem arises from two main sources: industrial activity in one part of the world and land use and management in the rest. The most sensitive issues for human society that change could bring relate first to patterns of rainfall, with their impact on agriculture, forestry and natural ecology; and secondly, on a longer timescale, to rises in sea level. The impact of changing rainfall would obviously vary between regions. Current models are not yet capable of predicting regional and seasonal information. But, even if the cards of climatic advantage were redealt between countries, the biggest threat to all would be the

(Sir Crispin Tickell, United Kingdom)

dislocation caused by change itself. Change would be especially important in marginal agricultural areas; in short, those least able to cope with it - in other words, the world's poor.

Average sea levels have risen by some 10 to 15 centimetres already over the last century. If this trend should accelerate, low-lying regions throughout the world would be threatened. In such countries as Bangladesh, Egypt, the Maldives and the Netherlands, the effects of a rise in sea levels could be disastrous. Low-lying areas on the east coast of my own country would be threatened. Many countries would need to erect new and larger coast defences where feasible. This would be, it goes without saying, a serious drain on economic resources.

There are still great uncertainties about climatic trends. Some countries have already embarked on extensive programmes of scientific research. In Britain we have a major research programme at our Meteorological Office, where we provide one of the world's four centres for the study of climatic change through global climate modelling. My Government is also increasing its research effort on climate impact. But, like other environmental problems, such change can best be tackled through concerted international action. We attach particular importance to co-ordinated research to reduce the current range of uncertainties. We play a full part in the World Climate Programme. We welcome the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change by the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization and the International Council of Scientific Unions. The Intergovernmental Panel, on which senior British scientists will serve, will need to work out co-ordinated assessments of the likely range of future greenhouse warming and the associated climate impact. This work should serve as a basis for future international policy. The World Climate Programme and the Intergovernmental Panel form the twin pillars of international efforts to cope with climate change. They deserve the full support of Governments and



(Sir Crispin Tickell, United Kingdom)

intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as scientific institutions throughout the world. It should go without saying that we do not want to add to the mechanisms which have already been set in place for fear of causing confusion and duplication.

No one knows how long it is likely to take for the current increase in greenhouse gases to cause warming effects. Some believe they are evident already. But, even before we have reduced the uncertainties through intensive research, there are measures which, in our view, deserve the support of the international community. I mention three.

First, chlorofluorocarbons: the damage that chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, have caused to the ozone layer is well known. These substances may also account for as much as 30 per cent of any greenhouse warming expected by the middle of the next century, according to some recent projections. The controls on CFCs agreed last year in Montreal are an important first step, although my Government has recently called for them to be considerably strengthened. Even so, this first step will not only benefit the ozone layer but also reduce the effect of these powerful greenhouse gases. We look forward to the entry into force of the Montreal Protocol on 1 January 1989. We want the Protocol to receive the widest possible ratification. If that cannot be achieved, the prospects for future global conventions on the atmosphere are gloomy indeed.

Next, atmospheric carbon dioxide: this is the single most important cause of greenhouse warming. The balance of scientific evidence points to fossil fuel combustion as the principal cause. The control of such emissions must therefore form the leading element in any strategy for limiting the greenhouse effect. Cost-effective measures to promote energy efficiency are already justified and must be encouraged. Emphasis should also now be placed on realistic energy pricing. The discounts on fossil fuels that have been applied from time to time to support

(Sir Crispin Tickell, United Kingdom)

other policies, however desirable in themselves, result in more fossil fuel being burnt than is economically justified. Proper energy pricing helps economic development of renewable energy sources and greater investment in energy efficiency. Application of measures of this kind would minimize the emission of carbondioxide, but it would not of course solve the problem.

(Sir Crispin Tickell,  
United Kingdom)

Something more drastic might therefore be required. We need to look at energy policy as a whole. We should remember that nuclear power - fission today, perhaps fusion tomorrow - is a source of great potential. If it has problems, so have other energy sources, above all coal. Then there are the growing possibilities of other renewable resources, such as solar power. Neither nuclear nor solar power generates greenhouse gases.

Lastly, deforestation, one of the most tragic events of our time: land use practices have been a major cause of the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The initial increase in the closing decades of the last century appears to have resulted from deforestation in temperate areas. The current acceleration of deforestation elsewhere in the world is making things much worse. For many reasons, of which this is only one, an urgent international effort is needed to halt the squandering of resources which deforestation represents, and to manage the world's diminishing stock of forests in the interests not only of the countries directly concerned but of the human species and life itself.

Climate change, whether natural or man-made, raises problems of a kind which no one has had to face before. The Member States and peoples of the United Nations must be fully seized of it. If ever there were a global problem needing a global response, this is it; we are all in it together, and we must work together to cope with it. That is what the United Nations is for. In our view, climate should not be regarded as the common heritage of mankind, which as a concept has implications inappropriate in this case and an unfortunate history. Rather, we see climate as something more challenging: our common responsibility. Last week Mrs. Thatcher said:

"no generation has a freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy with a full repairing lease."

My country intends to work with others to meet the terms of that lease in full.

Mr. FORTIER (Canada): In introducing this item on climate change the Foreign Minister of Malta emphasized a fundamental truth, namely, that the air we breathe, the water we draw, the land we live upon, do not know any political boundaries. Pollution cannot be contained within our borders; it flows to our neighbours, it can engulf the planet, and what is happening is not simply a question of poisoning our air, our water and our land. Even non-polluting activities can, in the long run, destroy our precious habitat.

Throughout the ages mankind has had to cope with the merciless power of natural disasters, from floods to drought, calling them acts of God or nature. But when our own actions tamper with nature we threaten our existence to a far greater extent than even the worst cataclysm. In many cities people are sick and dying because of air pollution. That same pollution is depleting the ozone layer and, through the greenhouse effect, warming the globe. In our efforts to harvest wood and increase our living space we are destroying the forests which give us oxygen. So where rains once fell, there is drought; where land was dry, there are floods. And the chain is not simple. A combination of factors is creating ecological turmoil. It is said - we have all heard it - that there is nothing new under the sun, but here we are creating a new environment: hot, dirty and dangerous to our lives.

My delegation is encouraged to see the emphasis given to environment by almost all Member States this year. On the atmosphere alone, many countries have already signed the Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer, and we look forward to more signatures. The increasingly urgent question of global warming and climate change received serious attention at the World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, held in Toronto last June. Canada is also hosting an experts' meeting in February with a view to commencing work on an umbrella framework convention for the protection of the atmosphere.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

In other forums, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to name but a few, have done substantive research on the changing atmosphere and have provided sound guidance to world bodies on policy directions. National Governments, public institutions, private organizations and committed individuals have all done their share to inform us about what we face and what we must do to combat these very grave problems, which we have caused. And indeed those problems are not confined to the atmosphere. Our waters and lands are threatened by toxic wastes, overcrowding in certain areas and the after-effects of competition for scarce resources, particularly in developing countries. Much good work has been done. We have to do more, and to be truly effective we must pool our resources. In the past countries have come together to solve common problems. Solutions have not always been achieved, but one inevitable result is knowledge. Knowledge helps us to improve our economic growth and development so that we are not just scrambling to survive, damaging our immediate environment in the process, but are in a position to sustain and expand the resource capital of our planet.

To this end, my delegation is circulating a proposal on a 1992 conference on sustainable development. Our proposal has received a lot of attention and positive input in the true spirit of constructive co-operation. Many delegations recognize that we cannot rely on "quick fixes" to deal with the problems which accompany economic growth and development. We must try to do our part and carefully monitor our activities and ensure that the long-term costs do not prove deadly to us.

As I mentioned earlier, my delegation is pleased to see the attention that is being given to the environment. The representative of Malta has called on the world to pay heed to the problem of the changing climate. We support efforts to address this particular problem, which is one facet of all the problems facing us.

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

We believe it is absolutely essential to study not only the changing atmosphere, but the changing waters and land. It is important to understand the linkages between these ecological events.

In our deliberations over the next few days my delegation will have an opportunity to develop further the issues highlighted here. Environmental problems are not new, but, as we come to grips with the intricate web of interconnected phenomena, we shall need new approaches to ensure that our planet remains habitable for future generations.

Mr. PEÑALOSA (Colombia) (interpretation from Spanish): We should like to associate ourselves today with the celebration of the forty-third anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations. We take this opportunity to pay a tribute to the tens of thousands of officials whose intelligence, labour and dedication have contributed to the successes achieved; our thanks go to them all, from those at the lowest level to the Secretaries-General, who have borne the supreme responsibility for the management of its destiny. As founder members we express our hope that the Organization is entering a phase in which for the first time it will be able fully to justify its founders' hopes. That is why my delegation will support initiatives designed to strengthen and make more effective the roles of the Security Council and the International Court of Justice in the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes.

The issue at present before the Assembly, thanks to the draft resolution presented by the delegation of Malta, is perhaps the most challenging and urgent to come before us since the possibility of a nuclear holocaust emerged 43 years ago.

After 10,000 years of atmospheric stability the Earth is entering a century of potentially dramatic changes in its climate. The fact that the planet's atmosphere is warming up is not a matter of doubt; on the contrary there is unanimous agreement that this is happening, the only question being how much and how fast.

The change in the planet's climate owing to the warming up of the atmosphere will produce a host of dramatic consequences, but two are outstanding. The first is the rise in the sea level, as a result of which several of the countries represented here today could well vanish before the end of the next century. It is worth recalling here what was said by the President of the Republic of Maldives a year ago when referring to the danger that this represented for his country. He said:

"We did not contribute to the impending catastrophe to our nation; and, alone, we cannot save ourselves." (A/42/PV.41, p. 26)

(Mr. Peñalosa, Colombia)

Many other countries would lose millions of hectares of their best agricultural land. This would be the case in several countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, India and China, where a large part of the rice consumed throughout the world is produced.

The second effect of climate change would be related to agriculture. As a result of the heating up of the atmosphere the humidity of the soil and the rainfall would both be reduced. The best agricultural land in North America, the Soviet Union and China would be particularly affected; much of their land would revert to simple pasture, with all the consequences for agricultural production. That would be a universal tragedy from which no one would emerge unharmed.

The rising sea level would also affect countless human settlements in many parts of the world where hundreds of millions of people at present live. The task of protecting such principal cities as Cairo, New Orleans and Shanghai, to mention only three, would cost not billions but trillions of dollars.

Theoretically there are two main paths to follow if we want to prevent the change in climate from reaching critical levels. First, we can turn away from such fossil fuels as oil and coal, or at least use them more efficiently. Secondly, we can check deforestation and, ideally, reverse it. The first measure would be the responsibility principally of the industrialized world. The second, would to a considerable extent be the responsibility of the developing world. Experience has shown that success could be achieved in both areas.

It would be naive and unfair, however, to expect the developing world to halt deforestation, let alone reverse it, by increasing the forest cover in order to prevent the heating up of the planet unless the problems of hard-core poverty in developing countries at present crushed by debt and underdevelopment were also resolved. All scientists agree, however, that the process of climate change is not



(Mr. Pefialosa, Colombia)

reversible; in other words, the damage that has already been caused will continue. We have, therefore, no time to lose. In the coming decades we must stop the process from going further, and we therefore need to act now. We do not have to persuade the experts, they are already fully convinced; what are necessary now are political decisions, which will require the determination of our leaders and the backing of public opinion.

The political challenge is not an easy one. In the developed world the oil and car-manufacturing interests have enormous power. In the developing world debt, trade deficits, and the vital need to increase the standard of living of poor populations enjoy top political priority. But, as the Prime Minister of Norway stated last year, if we do not succeed in putting our message of urgency through to today's parents and decision-makers, we risk undermining our children's fundamental right to a healthy, life-enhancing environment.

Our delegation considers that an international agreement for the protection of the environment is a matter of urgency. Such a world-wide agreement would serve to encourage national leaders to take the difficult political decisions that are needed, taking into account both the national interest and the shared interest of the planet as a whole.

In concluding, my delegation wishes to pay a tribute to the United Nations Environment Programme, which, under the leadership of Dr. Mostafa Tolba, has made an effective contribution to alerting world public opinion to the matter we are discussing today.

My delegation supports the draft resolution presented by the Maltese delegation, particularly the proposal to declare the world's climate the common heritage of mankind, and hopes that the Assembly will do the same.

Mr. COSTELLO (Australia): The value and uniqueness of the United Nations are demonstrated when it confronts and effectively deals with issues which transcend national boundaries. The issue we consider this morning - climate change - is one which requires urgent consideration at the highest international level as well as within our own national and regional settings. Future generations will judge our nations and this Organization by the legacy we leave them. The world's environment is an important part of that legacy, and it is up to us to nurture it.

There are already many signposts to show us the damage being done to the earth's environment. The Secretary-General's report on the "Overall socio-economic perspective of the world economy to the Year 2000" very lucidly, and disturbingly, highlights the many threats to our environment, including those from hazardous wastes and from increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide and chloroflourcarbons in the atmosphere.

The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development - the Brundtland report - very vividly underscores how intimately social, political and economic development is entwined with the environment. The report points to the need for a reorientation of our thinking about the meaning of economic growth: it challenges us to decide between immediate economic and social imperatives and the necessity for sustainable development.

Australia has not been immune to man-made environmental problems. As in many other countries, development considerations have tended to dominate land-use decision-making in Australia for most of the last 200 years, often at the cost of the environment. We are rapidly implementing policies to redress this, but meanwhile our soils continue to blow away and we continue to lose native vegetation and habitat at too great a rate. Tragically, since European settlement over half

(Mr. Costello, Australia)

our original tree cover has been removed and more than three quarters of our rain forests are gone for ever. The loss to our agricultural production as a result of soil erosion is significant.

It is against that background that my Government has given prominence to environmental protection and promotion policies. In the words of the Australian Minister of the Environment, Senator Richardson,

"The environment is not peripheral, it is not just the icing on the cake, it is central to economic development - it is the cake itself".

While the Australian Government has the issues involved under careful consideration, it endorses the general thrust of the Brundtland report and the principle of sustainable development. Australia recognizes, however, that the implementation of the report is no simple matter. For Australia, it means greater efforts to protect and sustain our land, our soils, our waters, our atmosphere and the seas which surround our island continent. The new era of economic growth envisaged in the report will require, as in other countries, a reorientation of our economy and our attitudes. But we must make the effort.

We recognize also that the adjustment problems faced by Australia may be small compared with those faced by developing economies. We are committed through our bilateral development assistance programme to assisting those nations to achieve sustainable development. At the same time, we recognize, and will be sensitive to, the added short-term difficulties that a change to sustainable, environmentally sound development paths will cause.

Australia will encourage a responsible direction by its developed partners in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). We agree with what Prime Minister Brundtland wrote in the forward to the World Commission report - namely, that

(Mr. Costello, Australia)

"Many of the development paths of the industrialized nations are clearly unsustainable. And the development decisions of these countries, because of their great economic and political power, will have a profound effect upon the ability of all peoples to sustain human progress for generations to come".

(A/42/427, p.14)

The proposed 1992 world conference on sustainable development is a meeting which we regard as potentially significant for pursuing the recommendations of the Brundtland report and mapping out a strategy for further action.

In the international arena, Australia has participated actively in recent overseas conferences on climate change, such as the Toronto World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, and is involved in more specialized research programmes such as the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme. Australia has provided funding for the Commonwealth sea-level-rise study and has served as host for the Greenhouse 87 and 88 Conferences, which addressed the scientific and public-awareness aspects of the greenhouse issue.

Of particular concern to us is the potential of climate change to cause serious economic and social disruptions in countries of the South Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. At the September 1988 South Pacific Forum meeting Australia put forward an initiative, which was welcomed by other Forum members, for a feasibility study for establishing a network of stations to monitor the effect on tides of climate change in the region and, in the light of the outcome of that study, to fund the establishment of such a network.

We have signed the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and Australia is, in fact, moving beyond the parameters set by the Protocol on the domestic production of chloroflourocarbons. We shall participate in the review of the Protocol, which is due for completion in 1990, and actively support the strengthening of the Protocol provisions.

(Mr. Costello, Australia)

While substantial progress has been made towards responding positively to key environmental issue in Australia and in many other countries, a very great deal remains to be done.

In our view the priority at this stage is to ensure adequate data collection and processing for the scientific research which still needs to be done.

More research into climate change is critical. Although a significant body of scientific opinion points to substantial effects, it is not yet possible to predict accurately the extent of the greenhouse effect or what its long-term impact may be. And accurate data is essential if difficult policy issues are going to have to be addressed.

There is international agreement about global changes, but only speculation about the regional impacts. Studies done so far are based largely on Northern Hemisphere parameters, and it is particularly important that more Southern Hemisphere research be undertaken. Because of different conditions, Northern Hemisphere predictions are of limited value in the South.

We must also study economic, social and ecological impacts of climate change on a regional and industry basis.

Countries must be encouraged to integrate their energy and environment policies. Studies will need, particularly, to consider the plight of developing countries and their differing energy and environment characteristics.

Concerted action by Governments is required to address, if not reverse, factors affecting climate change. We welcome the initiative of the Canadian Government to serve as host in February next year for an experts conference to consider the legal and environmental policy issues associated with plans for a framework international convention on the protection of the atmosphere. In our view, this must first attempt to come to grips with the likely important policy issues, before the legal issues are tackled.

(Mr. Costello, Australia)

Australia fully supports the research work on climate change being undertaken by United Nations bodies. We strongly support actions by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to foster research in this field. The WMO-UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will be the most important body through which internationally co-ordinated scientific assessments of the nature, timing and potential impact of climate change will be developed. Australia will have high-level representation at the first meeting of this Panel next month in Geneva. The Panel should report, at least initially, to the world climate conference in 1990, and should have an input into preparations for the 1992 conference on sustainable development.

Steps also need to be taken urgently to ensure that the United Nations system marshals its available resources and expertise to meet the immediate challenges. There must be appropriate consultation and co-ordination with other sources of expertise.

We are encouraged by the interest of other delegations, and see it as vital that the Assembly send a clear signal to the world community about the critical importance of the environment issue and the need to define the problems fully and to develop strategies to enable us to pass to our descendants a planet fit to live on.

Mr. ZAPOTOCKY (Czechoslovakia) (interpretation from Russian): The question of protection of the environment and ensuring an economically healthy and safe development for all countries has rightly come to the fore and riveted the attention of the international community. This can be seen from a series of statements made by heads of delegation in plenary meetings of the General Assembly. Evidence of this was also to be seen in the statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, who spoke at the beginning of this morning's meeting. All the statements alert us to the alarming global ecological threat. Fully justified demands have therefore been heard that the United Nations and its system of organizations assume a greater role as a universal multilateral forum for mobilizing international efforts to combat this threat.

As we know, a series of proposals along those lines have been put forward at both last year's and this year's sessions of the General Assembly. That is precisely the background against which we assess the proposal of the delegation of Malta for mobilizing international co-operation to conserve the climate on a global scale. We find that proposal, on which the head of the delegation of Malta spoke so convincingly this morning, interesting, innovative and worthy of careful study.

Indeed, the processes which are taking place in the climate at both the regional and the global levels speak to us of changes that threaten to become irreversible. The negative impact of such processes as global warming and the greenhouse effect can already be felt. It is therefore necessary to focus our attention on eliminating the causes leading to those processes.\*

---

\*Mr. Dlamini, (Swaziland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(Mr. Zapotocky, Czechoslovakia)

The climate is a very complicated result of the impact of both the natural factors, primarily the ecological balance between land, water and the atmosphere, and the productive activities of mankind, including the use of natural resources. In the process of mutual interaction between man and nature, States must achieve that degree of harmonization in economic development and in the interests of maintaining the environment which will result in a halt to and gradual reduction in the negative processes of the ecosystem on the regional and global levels. It is necessary also for all States to observe, to the extent possible, those principles and standards of ecological co-operation which would prevent any harm to their neighbours and to the entire international community. It is necessary for co-operation to grow, co-operation which will gradually lead to the formation of a state of security and conservation of the environment on a global scale.

We consider the problem of ensuring optimum climatic conditions for mankind as extremely important. With regard to specific proposals it will none the less be necessary to weigh and discuss a number of questions. Time is required to develop fully the approaches to all aspects of the Maltese initiative. For example, we must take a careful look at the positive results of the work already being done by such organizations as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the regional commissions of the United Nations. It will be necessary also to consider the relevant sections of the system-wide medium-term plan of the United Nations on the environment, in particular the section dealing with climate. In the light of the foregoing it is necessary to weigh carefully the advisability of establishing within the United Nations new institutions, new elements, such as co-ordinating mechanisms and expert groups.



(Mr. Zapotocky, Czechoslovakia)

It is important to pay attention also to the legal aspect of the concept of the common heritage of mankind. That concept includes a definite legal meaning and its application to the climate calls not only for ourselves but for all other delegations to consider problems relating to the status of the air space over the territories of various States to which their sovereignty extends.

The General Committee adopted a decision to begin consideration of agenda item 148 - Conservation of climate of part of the common heritage of mankind - in a plenary meeting and that its further consideration should continue in the Second Committee in connection with other questions which have a direct bearing on environmental questions. We will be prepared to participate constructively in the discussions. We hope that the elements of mutual understanding we are to take up and consider when we discuss questions on the environment at this session of the General Assembly will represent a potential for the consensus we need so desperately to reach our common goal: a healthy environment for our own generation and for generations to come.

Mr. BADAWI (Egypt): Allow me to extend my delegation's thanks to the Foreign Minister of the Government of Malta for his valuable presentation in introducing the item on our current General Assembly agenda entitled "Conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind". Egypt wholeheartedly supports any initiative by a Member State that calls for common concerted action by the international community seeking the welfare of mankind now and for ever. We believe that environmental issues are diverse and of a global nature; hence we share the views expressed by the Secretary-General on the multifaceted nature of climate.

(Mr. Badawi, Egypt)

Protection of the climate of necessity involves all of us living in this universe. It therefore follows that a coherent and well co-ordinated approach should be sought. Egypt therefore signed in 1985 and then ratified in 1988 the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer; it also ratified in 1988 the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

We believe that responsibility is indivisible, however much needs to be done in the field of research, data collection and the exchange of information. Moreover, environmental issues are interrelated; thus a solution to one aspect of the problem should not be at the expense of another. The economic future of the developing countries in particular is at stake in this regard.

In this connection we emphasize the role of the United Nations as a multilateral forum and we commend the achievements of the United Nations Environment Programme in the area of protecting the environment and providing assistance to the developing countries. The need to strengthen its role is already called for in General Assembly resolutions, particularly resolution 42/187. However, we once again emphasize the importance of co-ordination and the primary role of the United Nations Environment Programme vis-à-vis all activities undertaken by the United Nations system. We look forward to the deliberations of the Second Committee when it takes up the item, and hope that a fruitful outcome will emanate from the discussions, one that will reflect the concerns of us all.

Dame Ann HERCUS (New Zealand): In New Zealand we have a Maori proverb "Tukino ao tukino koe". Translated it means "Destroy nature, destroy yourself". That goes to the very heart of our reasons for participating in this debate. Responsible management of and accountability for the environment has become a key issue in the late twentieth century. It is no longer merely a question of how environmental changes will affect the quality of our lives but whether, given the pressures on it, our world can continue to sustain life in the next century and beyond. Put simply, we know that collectively we are steadily destroying nature. Our activities are damaging not merely the surface of our planet but also the fabric of the delicate, fragile atmosphere on which all life on this planet depends. It is appropriate and timely, since the threat to long-term survival concerns us all, that this Assembly should meet here today to consider one crucial element of those environmental concerns, that of climate change. Like other speakers, I wish to express New Zealand's appreciation for the initiative taken by the Government of Malta to draw special attention to this major issue on the international agenda.

New Zealand now recognizes that the matter of climate change is fundamental to the well-being of our country and our people; indeed, it has implications for the very survival of communities in New Zealand and many other countries. Regrettably, we, like others, have not always had this wider awareness.

We have not always been so conscious of the impact on us of environmental developments far removed from our part of the world. Our interest was focused on our immediate region of the South Pacific and Antarctica. The problems of Northern Hemisphere industrial pollution and acid rain, of tropical rain forest destruction and of desertification were important but somewhat distant from our immediate concerns.

(Dame Ann Hercus, New Zealand)

Like other Governments around the world, we now openly acknowledge the inadequacy of such an approach. The complex nature of environmental problems and their severe global consequences were illustrated for us by that major document "Our Common Future" prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development, the recommendations of which were adopted as a consensus of this Assembly at its last session. We simply cannot now ignore or minimize the global impact of environmental abuse. The loss of forests, for example, has by some estimates directly affected the lives of one fifth of the world population, through flooding, fuel shortages and the degradation of soil and water. Now we know, too, of the indirect effects on global climate since forests recycle the air we breathe and their cutting or burning, like the burning of fossil fuels, adds to the strain on our biosphere. Mindless abuse or careless mismanagement of the environment, wherever it occurs, affects us all.

The most graphic evidence of this reality, and of the linkage between various kinds of environmental damage, is presented by the depletion of the ozone layer above the Antarctic and elsewhere. An even more complex problem has arisen with the effects of fossil fuel consumption, tropical rain forest depletion and desertification, which together have created the greenhouse effect. Scientific predictions about the latter suggest significant increases to the earth's temperature over the next 50 years. Few doubt that the warming will have serious, and even horrific, consequences in many populated areas. For example, the threat to sub-Saharan countries through drought could be devastating. New Zealand and its South Pacific neighbours, like other islands, could be severely affected as rising sea levels drown low-lying atolls and coastal areas.

It is therefore essential that environmental initiatives, whether they be at the national, regional or global level, be well focused and carefully

(Dame Ann Hercus, New Zealand)

co-ordinated. Equally important, we need the fullest exchange of information. From the steadily growing body of scientific information and research on climate change, its causes and its implications, many varying conclusions and recommendations can be drawn. In some areas scientific questions may exist as to the precise nature or impact of one aspect of climate change. We believe that this Assembly, while recognizing that questions still remain about the exact nature of this crisis, must make the required political commitment to deal with that crisis resolutely.

For only by concerted international efforts, such as last year's adoption of the Montreal Protocol to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, can we ensure that international action is soundly based and action oriented. While we should not rule out the possibility of even tighter controls, that Protocol is a useful model of what can be achieved: we hope it will obtain wide adherence. We are committed to support for similar international initiatives in future.

The issue of climate change is a matter of such vital global importance that it must receive the fullest and most careful attention of this Organization. Moreover, we believe that co-operation in dealing with the many facets of this issue can best be served if consensus support from the membership as a whole is the basis on which we proceed. In debating this issue here and in negotiating an appropriate resolution aimed at moving forward on the issue, we hope we can avoid the introduction of extraneous concepts that might impair the prospects for a consensus approach. Our common objective - the implementation of measures required to preserve the global climate - demands no less.

(Dame Ann Hercus, New Zealand)

It is also our strong wish that in charting a path forward the international community will continue to give full recognition to existing capabilities within the United Nations system. We see this as an opportunity, rather than to create new bureaucracies, to strengthen the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. We welcome the steps towards closer co-operation between those bodies. We stand prepared to assist with contributing expertise as required.

I openly confess that in studying this issue I have found difficulty in understanding the vastness of its implications. Maybe others have too. My difficulty lies in part in comprehending fully the appalling environmental and human impact of even conservative assessment of change, and also the scale and complexity of the scientific issues involved. We are also conscious of the difficult choices to which protecting the environment gives rise and the huge potential impact on economic growth and development. In the latter area the concept of sustainable development is one of which donor and recipient countries alike must take full account.

To secure a greater understanding of the dangers requires broader understanding of what the scientists themselves are agreed on. An inventory of the international scientific concerns and effort, in simple language, could help to focus the attention of the policy-makers, such as ourselves, on the sorts of effective action which might be taken internationally, be it directed against ozone depletion and fluorocarbons, air pollution or waste dumping. For, despite the scientific uncertainties, we must not run risks with the future of our planet. As the Maoris say, "Destroy nature, destroy yourself."

Mr. RANA (Nepal): Only last week the General Assembly took up consideration of agenda items concerning natural disasters in Jamaica, the Sudan and Bangladesh. Today, even as the General Assembly is considering this item, Central American States, particularly Nicaragua, are facing the ravages of a cyclone. These calamities, resulting from hurricanes, drought and flooding, and affecting three different continents once again remind the international community of the global range and variety of climate-induced phenomena.

If through the milleniums of human civilization climate has influenced the social and economic activities of mankind, it has only recently been recognized that human activities, too, can and do significantly affect climate. In this regard, we believe that the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and last year's landmark report of the Brundtland Commission have been revealing.

Phenomena such as acid rain, ozone depletion, desertification, massive flooding and species loss have exposed linkages between ecology and the economy. More than ever before the international community is now realizing that climate constitutes yet another key variable in the ecology-economy equation.

It has, for example, been documented that industrial man's production and consumption of chlorofluorocarbons is destroying the Earth's protective ozone layer. Excessive burning of fossil fuels and large-scale deforestation are also threatening to induce regional and global climate change. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has warned that by the middle of the next century our planet could face a serious rise in temperature. Already it has been reported that the global temperature has been rising since 1980 and has considerably increased in the past 15 months, while the first five months of 1988 were the warmest on record.

The opening of a veritable Pandora's box of serious climatic and environmental change can easily be envisaged, affecting food chains on land and sea, increasing

(Mr. Rana, Nepal)

air pollution, and even threatening coastal cities and small low-lying countries, such as the Maldives in our region.

Nepal recognizes that valuable contributions have been made in recent years by many scientists and researchers in the area of global climate and climate change. We are also conscious of the substantial efforts of the UNEP, the World Meteorological Organization and the International Council of Scientific Unions to develop internationally accepted assessments of the reality, as well as the causes and impact, of climate change.

We recognize that only through a well-co-ordinated global effort will it be possible to address effectively the many interlocking issues on which consensus needs to be reached on the conservation of climate in the enlightened long-term interest of all mankind. Since significant climate or environmental changes in the Himalayan foothills would have a most profound impact on the annual precipitation that occurs over much of South Asia, Nepal would certainly co-operate in any United Nations studies thus directed. We believe a beginning has already been made by the establishment in Kathmandu of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, for the promotion of mountain development in ways that do not threaten the Himalayan ecosystem.

These are some of the considerations that explain our interest in the concept of conserving climate as part of the common heritage of mankind. We consider this to be a forward-looking idea and express appreciation to Malta for the initiative and to its Foreign Minister for his eloquent introduction of the draft resolution this morning. We are confident that our deliberations will mark the beginning of a new and timely effort by the international community to flesh out and concretize an idea whose time it seems has most definitely come.



Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway): It is becoming increasingly clear that the threat of climatic change is a pressing issue that requires our collective priority attention. We may well be on the threshold of changes to our climate so drastic that they will profoundly change human life. This problem - the "greenhouse effect", which should more appropriately be called "the heat trap" - must now be dealt with as a matter of urgency. We must take corrective action, we must take it together, and we must take it now.

Scientists still have no unanimous view on the magnitude of the climatic change, but it is established beyond reasonable doubt that we will experience a global change in climate.

The effect on the whole ecological balance of such a change could be dramatic. The time span needed for plants to adjust to a new climate is normally hundreds of years. The deserts will expand. The crops in today's marginal areas will be lost. Extremes of weather - storms, rainfall, frost or heat - may become more common. The sea level may rise considerably, and, with one third of the world's population living in low-lying coastal areas, such a development will have dramatic consequences. Political stability may be threatened in many parts of the world, and the number of ecological refugees may increase. In sum, climatic change will affect us all profoundly, regardless of where we live. And, as always, the poorest countries will be the ones most severely affected.

All of this may not happen, or at least not that severely. But the potential risk is so high that we cannot afford just to sit back and hope that problems will go away. We are the ones who must take the initiatives. We must set the limits, and we must prevent potential disasters for future generations. That is our shared responsibility.

Emissions of carbon dioxide and a number of other gases contributing to global heating, acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer - these are not separate problems; they are heavily interlinked with each other.

(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

The time has come to develop a strategy, to develop an action plan for protecting the atmosphere. In the view of the Norwegian Government, we should consider establishing a global convention on the protection of the climate and the atmosphere. This was first proposed by the Norwegian Prime Minister, Mrs. Gro Harlem Bruntland, at the Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, in Toronto in June this year. Thus this is a matter of the highest concern and of top priority to my Government. Allow me in this connection to express my delegation's appreciation to the many speakers who have made references to the role played by Prime Minister Gro Harlem Bruntland in the field of environment and development.

We should study further the relationship between climate and the depletion of the tropical rain forests, the green lungs of the globe. We should adopt effective measures to reduce emissions of harmful substances. We should develop and adopt environmentally sound energy strategies. Furthermore, we should co-ordinate scientific activity and increase technology research and technology transfer in the area of energy efficiency, in the area of new and renewable sources of energy, and in the area of clean and low-polluting technologies. In doing this, we should place particular emphasis on the needs of the developing countries.

As I have already stated, the protection of the climate and the atmosphere is a matter of priority concern to the Norwegian Government. Against this background my Government has welcomed the initiative by the Government of Malta to have the question of conservation of the climate inscribed on the agenda of this session of the General Assembly. My delegation looks forward to a good, constructive and substantive debate on this issue in the Second Committee. We stand ready to co-operate closely with the delegation of Malta and with all other delegations in the further work on this question at this session of the General Assembly.

(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

The question of the climate is very complex indeed. Many activities are already going on in this field in various organizations. We must bear this in mind in our discussions. What appears to be particularly important at this stage is to see to it that all the international activities in this area are well co-ordinated. This should, to the extent possible, be done within existing multilateral mechanisms. In brief, it is the hope of my delegation that in the coming weeks we shall be able to reach agreement on a resolution that will set the further consideration of this crucial issue on the right track.

Mr. BENHOUNA LOURIDI (Morocco) (interpretation from French): The Moroccan delegation is particularly grateful to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta and the delegation of Malta for having introduced this item and a draft resolution on the conservation of the climate as the common heritage of mankind.

On this anniversary of the creation of the United Nations, we are especially satisfied to see that the prestige of our Organization has been restored and its credibility strengthened, and that, furthermore, its responsibilities constantly extend to other challenges having planetary dimensions. The protection of the environment, the prevention of natural disasters, the conservation of the climate - all illustrate that as this millenium comes to an end, our organization must assume new deeply multilateral missions and that no State, however powerful, and no institution, however competent, can confront or resolve those problems in isolation.

(Mr. Bennouna Louridi, Morocco)

The effect of the climate on man was, according to current theories, more or less foreseeable, but it is only recently that climatologists have realized that human activities could themselves be the cause of change in the climate. These two processes clearly are not distinct; they have an influence on each other. However, the first requirement for the time being is to recognize the extraordinary complexity of climatic phenomena and in consequence the vast scale of our own ignorance.

Despite the technological progress that has taken place in recent decades in data collection, the power of computers and the refinement of the theoretical analysis of models, we are forced to the conclusion that while it is necessary to have 500 billion operations for a single medium-term weather forecast the scientific community will have to face unprecedented problems whose solution will depend to a large extent on new progress in the area not only of computers but also of space technology and telecommunications.

We already recognize that climatic fluctuations have become greater in recent years. Indeed, since the beginning of the industrial era the quantity of carbon gas present in the air has increased by more than 140 billion tonnes, and there is no longer any doubt that this concentration of gas, together with other thermal wastes caused by the development of energy consumption, could lead to an atmospheric warming of a few degrees, thereby threatening the temperature balance of the Earth.

At the same time, we know that the climate can be changed by accelerated urbanization, the development of extensive irrigation, the transformation of forest areas into farmlands and the destruction of the two lungs of the planet - the tropical and equatorial forests - to which must be added the greenhouse effect and the partial destruction of the ozone layer.

Admittedly, we have been no strangers to these phenomena throughout the long

(Mr. Bennouna Louridi, Morocco)

years of drought which have recently affected Africa and Asia and provoked the migration of millions of people seeking water, food and physical security. Climatic fluctuations have engendered greater variations in world grain reserves and, more generally, in food production at the regional and world levels.

There is a deeply felt need today to restore the climate of the past by means of paleoclimatology and to develop the means of predicting the natural development of the climate in the future. In any event the interrelationship of climate and human activities will henceforth be a matter of primary importance to which Governments and the United Nations cannot remain indifferent. On the contrary, it has been rightly said that history will judge Governments not only by what they have done in the areas of health, education and food but also by the care they have shown to protect the environment and the measures they have taken to prepare their countries to predict natural, climatic, geophysical and other disasters.

At the present time, the use of satellites and global communication techniques, as well as intensive dialogue among scientists, engineers, administrators and bodies responsible for making political decision, could undoubtedly make it possible to reduce the dangers resulting from climatic fluctuations, especially those of human origin.

Last year the General Assembly, by resolution 42/169, which had 93 co-sponsors, designated the 1990s a decade during which the international community, under the auspices of the United Nations, would ensure that international co-operation in the area of the prevention of natural disasters would be encouraged. My country worked very hard last year to ensure that the text was adopted by consensus.

We are convinced that the conservation of the climate as the common heritage of mankind is a theme complementary to that of combating natural disasters and is

(Mr. Bannouna Louridi, Morocco)

therefore especially deserving of the support of this Assembly. Thus, next year, during the forty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly, there should be an in-depth discussion encompassing, against the same background, the following topics: first, the protection of the environment and the convening of a conference on sustainable development; secondly, the reduction of natural disasters and the adoption of a world programme of action to that end; and, thirdly, the item we are discussing today, the conservation of our common climatic heritage and consideration of specific preliminary recommendations related thereto. These three elements, because of their very similarity, will give rise to a catalytic set of ideas which should be of benefit for both the concept and the process of the fourth United Nations development decade.

Finally, as a sponsor of the resolution on the conservation of the climate, Morocco hopes that the new challenges of major importance that confront the Assembly will find the world community more united in its commitment and acting in greater solidarity, for, as the Foreign Minister of Malta has said, climate knows neither political opposition nor political differences. We should therefore seize the opportunity offered us by the delegation of Malta to combine our efforts and our means and encourage complementarity to conserve the climatic conditions so necessary for the full flowering of man on our planet. I need hardly recall that it was thanks to Malta that the concept of the common heritage of mankind was introduced for the first time in an international forum, that is, the United Nations. Who does not remember the great Ambassador Arvid Pardo. We hope that this new initiative is going to allow us to enrich this promising concept of the common heritage of mankind.

Mr. VERGAU (Federal Republic of Germany): The introduction of an item calling for more awareness of the dangers that universally threaten the maintenance

(Mr. Vergau, Federal Republic  
of Germany)

of climatic conditions favourable to life on our planet is welcomed by my delegation. My Government appreciates this initiative taken by Malta.

The Federal Republic of Germany is ready to join others in the endeavour to enhance world-wide scientific research into the questions how and why climatic conditions change and explore appropriate means of averting the damage to all mankind that could result from such changes.

Climatic conditions exist or change irrespective of national borders. The consequences cannot remain a purely national matter; they concern us all. It is therefore right that the United Nations should play a role in this field and give an impetus to national and regional activities, perhaps even co-ordinating them. To this end, we join others in requesting the Secretary-General to report on all ongoing activities with a view to such co-ordination.

(Mr. Verqau, Federal Republic  
of Germany)

In a few days a World Congress on Climate and Development, organized in my country with the participation of the United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development, will be held in Hamburg under the auspices of our Head of State. This is an example of such activities that seek world-wide co-operation and co-ordination.

We have already ratified the Vienna Convention on Fluor-Chlorine and Hydrocarbons, and we will implement the Montreal Protocol as of 1 January 1989. We have adhered to a number of other conventions and instruments designed to reduce emissions of dangerous substances which were concluded in the framework of the Economic Commission for Europe. We are actively participating in the current conference on ozone at The Hague.

We promote research of the stratospheric ozone layer and of the greenhouse effect and other related programmes of climate research, and we are prepared to make them available for international co-operation.

Such international co-operation should, in our view, be integrated into the larger framework of activities undertaken in the United Nations system for the protection of the environment. We therefore believe that it would be neither necessary nor desirable to create yet another international institution. The United Nations Environment Programme - which is already participating in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - seems to us to be the most appropriate organ for co-ordinating international co-operation in this area.

All countries in all regions of the world are called to contribute constructively in research and on measures aiming at the protection of our climate. The Federal Republic of Germany is willing to do so.



Mr. KARIM (Bangladesh): Let me first thank the delegation of Malta for the initiation and introduction of this important item. It follows the tradition established by Malta of drawing attention to issues that override concerns of national sovereignty and jurisdiction and focusing instead on themes that highlight international concerns and global interdependence. This was the case that led to the establishment of a more rational and manageable régime for the oceans and seas; this initiative now concentrates on another, perhaps even more important, commonality: our shared ecosystem - the climate that governs mankind's survival and existence.

It is a fact that climate conditions our human activities. The converse is also true. The concerns that have promoted the initiation of this theme are well known though they are yet to sink fully into the consciousness of Governments, international agencies, decision-makers and public opinion. The discussion of the item constitutes an additional weightage to a variety of efforts directed towards this end, that is, the creation of global awareness and the necessity of integrating environmental considerations into economic decision-making and planning at all levels.

Our climate, which has sustained humanity's survival and growth, is characterized also by the havoc it can wreak. Bangladesh is among many disaster-prone countries that are victims of this reality. There is yet to be a fuller appreciation and accounting of the continuing and cumulative impact of disaster caused by floods, cyclones and drought among other natural phenomena, in terms of death, devastation, disease and disruption of economic and social activities and the incalculable cost of human suffering that they engender. The creation of a hazard-resilient world has become a foremost imperative.

Today other more serious concerns have surfaced that could threaten our very existence. Nature is bountiful, but it is also fragile and finely balanced. There

(Mr. Karim, Bangladesh)

are limits that cannot be crossed without endangering the basic integrity of the system. We are fast closing the gap in overstepping these limits through overuse of resources at a speed that allows little time to anticipate or prevent unexpected effects.

The symptoms are more than apparent: desertification and massive deforestation; rapid depletion of the ozone layer; introduction of toxic substances into the human food chain and water resources; indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels that have led to global warming that could conceivably cause, within the next 50 years, sea-level rises that could inundate coastal cities and river deltas and drastically upset national and international agricultural production and trade systems; acidification that has destroyed land, forests and lakes, bringing in its wake erosion, siltation, floods and local climatic change.

Certain realities have emerged. The cause of these dire environmental stresses and strains is as much the impact of nature as the nature of poverty exacerbated by the pursuit of indiscriminate growth. Responsibility accrues on both the developed and the developing nations. Environmental difficulties that confront us now are not new, but it is only recently that we have begun to understand their complexity. Previously the main concern centred on the effects of development on the environment. Today we are becoming increasingly more concerned about the ways in which environmental degradation can dampen or reverse economic development. The fundamental connection between the two has become a preponderant factor in the search for remedial solutions and has only become apparent in the very recent past.

Only a short while ago our planet was considered a large and disparate world in which human activities and efforts were neatly compartmentalized within nations, within sectors and within broad-based areas of concern, be they environmental,

(Mr. Karim, Bangladesh)

economic or social. These compartments have begun rapidly to dissolve in the light of a series of cumulative crises - environmental, energy and development. It is now recognized that these are not separate but one single crisis. Changes have locked the global economy and global ecology together. There is realization of the sharp increase in economic interdependence among nations. We are now forced to accustom ourselves to an accelerating ecological interdependence, as ecology and the economy become even more interlocked and intertwined.

The initiative of Malta has a two-fold operative dimension. The first is for this Assembly to declare climate to be the common heritage of mankind; the second, to examine the current situation with a view to elaborating a global strategy to conserve climate in order to ensure that life on Earth can be sustained.

(Mr. Karim, Bangladesh)

Bangladesh fully supports the concern to declare climate to be the common heritage of mankind. Heritage inherently involves the context of inheritance. We have indeed inherited our earth as a sacred trust from our forefathers and are in duty bound to honour this trust and pass it on to our children in a liveable state. Many proposals have been mooted regarding a global environmental strategy. Prime among them is the call by the World Commission on Environment and Development for transformation of its report into a United Nations programme of action on sustainable development and for a follow-up international conference to review progress made to set benchmarks and to maintain such progress within the guide-lines of human needs and natural laws. The Commission has also recommended that the General Assembly commit itself to preparing a universal declaration and later a convention on environmental protection and sustainable development. Meanwhile, the United Nations Secretary-General has also convened a panel of experts to prepare an adequate framework for implementing the international decade on natural disaster reduction.

I conclude with the fond hope that such proposals, all relevant to each other, will indeed converge into a broad-based global strategy that could be endorsed by a summit meeting on environmental concerns in the near future.

The PRESIDENT: We have heard the last speaker on the introduction of this item in plenary meeting. This item will now be considered in the Second Committee, as decided by the Assembly at its third meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 16 (continued)

## ELECTIONS TO FILL VACANCIES IN SUBSIDIARY ORGANS AND OTHER ELECTIONS:

- (a) ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME: DRAFT DECISION (A/43/L.13)

The PRESIDENT: The General Assembly, by resolution 42/185, entitled "Biennial cycle of sessions of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme", decided, among other things, that there should be no regular session of the Governing Council in 1988 and that, beginning in 1989, the regular sessions of the Council would be held only in odd-numbered years. Furthermore, by its decision 42/448, the Assembly decided to defer elections to the Governing Council until the forty-third session of the Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to conduct consultations with Governments to establish the necessary transitional arrangements for a change in the term of office of members of the Governing Council from three years to four, with one half of the membership being elected every two years.

With a view to ensuring a smooth transition in the process of changing the terms of office of the members of the Governing Council, consultations were held with the Chairmen of the regional groups and the transitional arrangements thus established are contained in the draft decision that has been circulated under this item (A/43/L.13).

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt this draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to the decision just taken, the Assembly will now proceed to the election of 39 members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme to replace the 39 members whose term of office expires on 31 December 1988.

(The President)

The 39 outgoing members are: Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia and Zambia.

Those members are eligible for immediate re-election.

I should like to remind members that, after 1 January 1989, the following States will still be members of the Governing Council: Brazil, Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Gabon, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Japan, Mauritania, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America, Venezuela and Zaire.

Therefore those 19 States are not eligible in this election.

In accordance with the transitional arrangements for changing the term of office of members of the Governing Council from three to four years, 10 of the new members will be elected for a one-year term and 29 for a three-year term. The Chairmen of the regional groups have advised us that the groups have agreed on the candidatures for each of these terms.

Under rule 92 of the rules of procedure, all elections must be held by secret ballot and there shall be no nominations. May I, however, recall paragraph 16 of General Assembly decision 34/401, whereby the practice of dispensing with the secret ballot for elections to subsidiary organs when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled should become standard, unless a delegation specifically requests a vote on a given election.

(The President)

In the absence of such a request, may I take it that the Assembly decides to proceed to the election on that basis?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: Since the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled by each group, we shall now proceed to declare the following States elected to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme: The 10 members for a one-year term beginning on 1 January 1989 are as follows: three seats for the African States, Lesotho, Mauritius and Zimbabwe; two seats for the Asian States, China and Indonesia; one seat for the Eastern European States, Yugoslavia; two seats for the Latin American and Caribbean States, Argentina and Barbados; two seats for the Western European and other States, Australia and France.

The 29 members for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 1989 are as follows: eight seats for the African States, Botswana, Cotê d'Ivoire, Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Rwanda, Sudan, Togo and Uganda; seven seats for the Asian States, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka; and three seats for the Eastern European States, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

(The President)

The five seats for the Latin American and Caribbean States go to Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guyana and Mexico. The six seats for the Western European and other States go to Canada, Finland, Malta, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I congratulate all the States which have just been elected members of the Governing Council.

We have now concluded our consideration of agenda item 16 (a).

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The PRESIDENT: Before adjourning I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on agenda item 33, entitled "Judgment of the International Court of Justice of 27 June 1986 concerning military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua: need for immediate compliance", be closed tomorrow at 4 p.m. If I hear no objection it will be so decided.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the debate to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.