

UNITED NATIONS LIBRARY

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
FEB 18 1972  
UN/SA COLLECTION



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/CONF.48/PC/15/Add.2  
27 January 1972

Original: ENGLISH

Preparatory Committee for the  
United Nations Conference on  
the Human Environment  
Fourth session  
New York, 6-17 March 1972  
Provisional agenda item 4

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE, INCLUDING FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the consolidated document on the United Nations  
system and the Human Environment, prepared by the  
Administrative Committee on Co-ordination.

Note by the Secretary-General

As recommended by the Preparatory Committee at its third session<sup>1/</sup>, a concise summary of the consolidated document prepared by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination is circulated herewith for consideration by the Preparatory Committee at its fourth session. The annex to the summary -- consisting of summarized statements on the work of various bodies and organizations of the UN system -- will be made available to participants in the session as a Conference Room Paper (A/CONF.48/PC(IV)CRP.1).

The consolidated document itself will be distributed with the other Conference documents under the symbol A/CONF.48/12.

The Conference document on Subject Area VI (A/CONF.48/11) has already been circulated to members of the Preparatory Committee under cover of document A/CONF.48/PC/15/Add.1.

1/ A/CONF.48/PC/13, para. 148

Concise summary of the consolidated document on the United Nations  
system and the human environment, prepared by the  
Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

Introduction

1. In any consideration of the future international action relating to the human environment it would seem important to have a full picture of the action already being undertaken or planned. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, comprising the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the executive heads of the specialized agencies, has therefore prepared a consolidated document on the "UN System and the Human Environment" which attempts to present such a picture and which will be submitted as a working document to the Stockholm Conference<sup>1/</sup>.
2. The third session of the Preparatory Committee for the UN Conference on the Human Environment recommended that the Preparatory Committee should receive before its fourth session a concise summary of the joint consolidated document prepared by ACC<sup>2/</sup>.
3. The purpose of the present document, which has been prepared in accordance with a decision by ACC at its meeting in New York on 22 October 1971, is to present such a concise summary of the consolidated ACC document.

Content of the consolidated ACC document

4. The human environment is a wide-embracing term and there is an immense and complex range of international activities which have a direct or indirect bearing on it. It is difficult to cover these activities in a clear and comprehensive manner: the document tries to present them in a form that would be most convenient for the Stockholm Conference.
5. Thus, Chapter I provides information on the current activities of the UN system relating to the environment, arranged in accordance with the main agenda items of the Conference, namely the Planning and Management of Human Settlements for Environmental Quality; The Environmental Aspects of Natural Resources Management; Identification and Control of Pollutants and Nuisances of Broad International Significance; Educational, Informational and Cultural Aspects of Environmental Issues; and Development of Environment. There is an additional section on multi-disciplinary aspects of ongoing activities within the UN system.

---

1/ A/CONF.48/12 - to be issued

2/ A/CONF.48/PC/12 para. 148

6. Chapter II analyses the programmes of the UN family in relation to the main functions that appear necessary in dealing with the human environment, such as the collection and exchange of information; monitoring and surveillance; research; the establishment of scientific criteria, of policy guidelines and standards, and of institutions; the formulation of regional and international agreements; the development of technology; education and training; and funding.

7. The Chapter outlines the approach taken, what is being done, and what is in an advanced stage of planning by the different organizations in each of these functional areas.

8. The annexes to the consolidated document provide a brief outline of the relevant work of each member of the UN family (Annex I) and a detailed compilation of their activities in relation to the Stockholm Conference agenda (Annex II). Annex II will not be reproduced as a conference document but will be available in the conference library.

9. Therefore, the ACC consolidated report could also be considered as a reference document. It lists activities by agenda items, by functions and by competence. This entails a great deal of repetition and this was thought to be preferable to excessive cross-referencing. While such a catalogue will, it is hoped, enable those interested to ascertain rapidly what is being done in any particular area and by whom, it might be helpful to have the conclusions in a more handy form. This is the purpose of the present document which, in addition to the conclusions from the consolidated document given below, includes an Annex where summarized statements are presented on the work of the various bodies and organizations of the United Nations system in relation to the Human Environment and on the constitutional basis for these activities.

#### Conclusions from the consolidated ACC document

10. A number of conclusions emerge from the consolidated statement and these are outlined below.

11. The constitutional responsibilities of the organizations comprising the UN family cover many important areas and questions relating to the human environment. This is natural since the organizations have a general mandate to promote human welfare and more specific mandates in specialized fields such as health; labour and the well-being of workers; food and agriculture; education, science and culture; postal arrangements; meteorology; maritime affairs; atomic energy; telecommunications; industrialization; trade and development; housing; transport and natural resources; civil aviation.

12. A great many activities are being carried out relating to each major agenda item of the Stockholm Conference, and several, if not most, organizations have programmes in several, if not most, of these subject areas.
13. It should be said at once that this does not mean that all questions relating to the environment are being dealt with, or adequately dealt with. Indeed, not only are there a number of gaps and new ground to be broken, but many questions are receiving inadequate attention. The multi-disciplinary, integrated approach called for by so many environmental questions has so far been applied only in a limited number of instances. The consolidated document does not show, nor is it intended to imply, that everything that needs to be done is being done, or that what is being done is done in the best possible way.
14. As is pointed out in the Introduction to the consolidated document, most UN organizations have been established on the sectoral pattern, reflecting the structure of national governments with separate departments for agriculture, health, labour, education, and so on. Each organization has been led, in the normal course of its history and by decisions of its Member States, to undertake activities relating to the environment in its own particular sector, since many environmental problems have an international dimension arising from their geographical scope, their universality, or their consequences for the future of mankind as a whole.
15. The sectoral approach remains valid for a large number of problems, which can be dealt with essentially from one specialized point of view. Thus, the problem of aircraft noise can be covered mainly by the organization responsible for civil aviation; problems of the working environment by the organization responsible for labour; etc. In dealing with such problems, the organization mainly concerned sometimes requires advice and support from another organization on a particular aspect. This type of co-operation is taking place in the UN system to an extent which is, perhaps, not fully appreciated. There is an increasing variety of problems, however, that require an integrated or "horizontal" approach. These call for a wider and more elaborate co-operative arrangements by organizations which are essentially sectoral or "vertical".
16. It should be emphasized at this point that the success of any attempt to tackle a particular environmental problem globally, through a multi-disciplinary approach, is a matter essentially for decision by Member States. Most action must, in fact, be taken nationally, and international action ultimately depends largely on action at the national level. What international organizations can do to foster and assist the efforts of Governments must also depend on agreement on general policies in the legislative organs of the organizations of the UN system. These are essential both to collective action and to coherent assistance to individual States in particular cases.

17. Agencies are often called on by Governments to deal with similar problems but from different points of view, and it has been the task of the co-ordination machinery to try and ensure that there is no overlapping or waste. The ACC provides a framework at the inter-secretariat level for co-ordination and co-operation for the UN system. This machinery is flexible and a variety of means have been evolved in response to varying needs. The ACC has established ad hoc functional groups of executive heads, such as the Functional Group on the Human Environment which prepared the consolidated document. In addition it has a wide range of subsidiaries which deal with many facets of the environment. There are joint committees and working groups - both inter-governmental and inter-secretariat; there is joint execution of projects, and there are inter-agency programmes. There has, in recent years, been an increasing trend towards dealing with large issues through joint, integrated programmes. Examples of this are provided by the Second Development Decade and work in the field of population, partially supported by the UN Fund for Population Activities. The UNESCO programmes on the International Hydrological Decade, on Man and the Biosphere and the work of the Inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission attempt to co-ordinate both inter-disciplinary and international research. Agroclimatological surveys are carried out in co-operation among FAO, UNESCO and WMO. The Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution represents the co-operative efforts of UN, FAO, IAEA, IMCO, WHO and WMO. Examples of such co-operative programmes are found not only in the area of research but also in operational activities financed under UNDP.

18. Once again, the consolidated document is not intended to imply that arrangements for co-operation work perfectly in all cases, or that no difficulties ever arise. But it can fairly be said that, considering the complexity and variety of questions that are handled by them, they provide an effective and dynamic mechanism.

19. The major emphasis of the activities of the UN system is on development, reflecting national priorities. However, as has been frequently pointed out, it is of great importance that development-oriented and environment-oriented activities be integrated as parts of the time planning process. It is essential for example to harmonize activities dealing with the conservation of natural resources and those dealing with their use. The ACC in its statement to the Economic and Social Council in July 1969<sup>1/</sup>, in fact urged members of the UN system to adopt "as far as possible an ecological and integrated approach in their activities relating to utilization of resources and environmental management".

20. There are important gaps in the present pattern of activities and certain functions are not being carried out. For example, there are important areas in which research is needed, such as the health effects of environmental contaminants, or the development of technology for abatement of pollution and for environmental quality control. There are several international information exchange and monitoring programmes, some of which are unable to accomplish more than a small part of the task. Data accumulated by national centres are often not made available to other countries. While each organization is collecting information in its own particular sphere, there is a need for arrangements to direct inquiries to the appropriate source. There is at present not enough technical assistance being provided to help governments in shaping realistic environmental policies consonant with development.

21. The Stockholm Conference will doubtless take a number of decisions perhaps in the form of an overall plan of action, designed to fill the gaps that exist and to provide a coherent global framework for environmental action. The UN system was not designed specifically to undertake this task; indeed it was not designed specifically for many of the tasks that it now regularly and effectively undertakes. New responsibilities do not automatically require new institutions and mechanisms, but do mean an adaptation of existing mechanisms and arrangements. Thus, after Stockholm the ACC would consider what adjustments in the arrangements for inter-agency co-operation are necessary, while the organizations could individually review the need for any changes in internal structure. As the ACC said in its statement of July 1969<sup>1/</sup>, the "complexity and magnitude of the problems of the human environment and their inter-disciplinary nature call for even more effective inter-agency co-operation".

22. Thus, it is seen that the institutions, the experience and a large measure of expertise needed, exist. The past quarter century has shown that the machinery can be adapted when necessary to assume the implementation of inter-governmental decisions and to facilitate the provision of technical assistance on environmental matters.

#### Summary

23. In summary, the ACC submits the following considerations:

- (i) The organizations of the UN system have constitutional responsibilities in large areas of the human environment;
- (ii) They are undertaking and planning a wide range of activities concerned with the human environment;

- (iii) The UN system has focused primarily on development. In many cases, environmental issues are facets of development, and the two should not be separated either in concept or in practice;
- (iv) There are important issues which are not at present covered, or are not covered adequately. In particular, there is a need for an integrated approach to many questions of the environment;
- (v) The UN system of organizations has been built up essentially on a sectoral pattern. Through the ACC it has machinery and arrangements for inter-secretariat co-ordination and co-operation, developed and tempered over the past quarter century. The ACC not only provides facilities for co-ordination of sectoral activities, but provides an inter-secretariat framework for an integrated and coherent approach to large general problems;
- (vi) A multi-disciplinary, international approach to environmental questions depends essentially on the political will and decisions of Member States;
- (vii) The UN system has institutions, experience and machinery which can be adapted to new tasks and needs. These are at the service of the world community to carry out any inter-governmental decisions resulting from the Stockholm Conference.