

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON 'ANTARCTICA, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE FUTURE', HELD IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, DURING 23 & 24 APRIL 1992

The International Academy of the Environment and the Geneva International Peace Research Institute organized this two-days' Conference on the Antarctic which took place in Science II of the University of Geneva on 23-4 April 1992. Speakers included Dr David Drewry (the new Director of the British Antarctic Survey), Dr Roger Gendrin (Director of the newly-organized French Institute for Polar Research and Technology), and other leading Antarctic scientists as well as diplomats and administrators.\*

The Conference both reviewed recent scientific research in the Antarctic and discussed the future development of Antarctic research activities. In addition to present accomplishments in monitoring the ozone 'hole', determining past climate and atmospheric composition from ice-cores, detecting global pollution, collecting meteorites, and analysing Antarctic contributions to global climate change, ocean circulation, and sea-level rise, there are new scientific challenges in astronomy, solar-terrestrial physics, geophysics, and biology, towards which Antarctic research could make important contributions.

The second day focused on Antarctica and its management, including descriptions of the Antarctic Treaty System and the problems of tourism and fishing in far-southern waters. There was a general feeling that significant change was needed in the management of Antarctic research, although not in the Antarctic Treaty mechanism itself. In particular, the present coordinating mechanism through the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) was felt to be under-funded and inadequate for future tasks of developing better-coordinated and more international programmes. For instance, it was stated that SCAR lacks resources to convene international groups of experts to design international research programmes in which many countries can participate. There were suggestions for an International Antarctic Science Foundation and for a permanent secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty System

permanent secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty System (though it should be noted that a proposal for the latter narrowly failed to be accepted at the last consultative meeting of the Antarctic Treaty Parties).

The emphasis of the Conference was clearly on science, and there were some differences of opinion as to the desirability of diverting some of the scarce resources available for 'cutting edge' research in order to deal with new environmental impact assessments and environmental monitoring. It was evident that there was some tension between scientific research workers and environmentalists, and that the correct balance of environmental regulation and cost-effectiveness had still to be worked out and applied. It was also acknowledged that the 'Antarctic community' had not communicated effectively with the outside world and needed to be more open as well as to educate the public more effectively than hitherto. The world has become increasingly interested in the Antarctic because of its critical role in global systems and its value as one of the best places to measure human impacts on the global environment. The UN General Assembly has requested reports on the state of the environment in Antarctica; it would be desirable for the Antarctic Treaty parties to cooperate with the United Nations agencies in preparing those reports.

\* Most sadly Lord Shackleton, who it had been hoped would open the Conference and participate throughout (*see* the **Important Prospect** by Dennis Thompson, published on page 378 of our last Winter issue), was unable for health reasons to come to Geneva. — Ed.

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