

Council of Europe Preparing Treaty on Environmental Damage Compensation

An international treaty to improve, at the European level, compensation for damage caused by dangerous activities to the environment, persons, and property, will be prepared as soon as possible by the Council of Europe. East European States might also participate in such work.*

This initiative has recently been taken by the European Committee on Legal Cooperation (CDCJ) of the 23-nations' Organizations. There is an urgent need for such a treaty, because environmental accidents frequently affect several countries. This European treaty

will complement already-existing special treaties on environmental damage caused by transport, nuclear accidents, hazardous waste, and sea pollution.

The European Committee on Legal Cooperation is a Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe which assembles governmental experts of the 23 member States and prepares work in the field of legal cooperation. Currently these States are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

* Already there was good news recently that Hungary is adhering to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, also called the 'Bern Convention', which provides for the protection of species in danger of disappearing, and indicates in particular 119 plant species and 400 species of fauna to be 'strictly protected'. — Ed.

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Tropical Timbers Solely from Sustainably-managed Sources by 1995?

At the meeting of the International Tropical Timbers Organization (ITTO) which was held during 13–23 May 1990 in Bali, Indonesia, WWF and other conservation INGOs pushed for the Organization to agree to the goal of a sustainable international tropical timber trade by the year 1995. This would mean that all tropical timber traded internationally would come from forests which are sustainably managed according to ITTO criteria. At the meeting, the ITTO agreed in principle with this goal, but set the target for the year AD 2000.

The WWF view is that we cannot afford to wait for 10 years. The urgency of the situation facing tropical forests was highlighted when an ITTO mission which had examined forest management in Sarawak, Malaysia, presented its findings. The mission reported that Sarawak, one of the world's major producers of tropical timber, will have logged all its primary forests outside protected areas within 11 years if present trends continue! After these primary forests have been logged, the productivity of logged-over-forests is not expected to be sufficient to allow future harvests at anything like current levels.

Another development at the ITTO meeting was the adoption of operational guidelines for 'best practice' in tropical forest management. These guidelines are in the form of a check-list, and not only cover forestry techniques, but involve taking care also of biodiversity and social issues.

In principle, tropical forest countries will now develop national guidelines based on the ITTO ones, but which will be relevant for the particular conditions of their own forests.

The ITTO meeting was preceded by a 2-days' NGO seminar organized by WWF on community involvement in forest management. The ITTO is basically promoting industrial-scale forest management but neglecting other options, and WWF wants to draw attention to this. Examples were given from Irian Jaya, Thailand, Peru, Dominica, and Brazil.

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Destruction of the Tropical Rain-forests: How 'Green' is Brazil's New President?

In November 1989, presidential elections were held in Brazil for the first time in 20 years. A good-looking young man, holder of the 'black belt' in karate, was elected as the country's chief executive. When, on March 15th of this year, the newly-elected Brazilian President, Fernando Collor de Mello, took office, one of his first official acts was to declare his commitment to the conservation of Brazil's environmental resources and the protection of the Amazon rain-forests. As a sign of goodwill, he nominated a leading Brazilian environmentalist, José Lutzenberger, as chief of the country's environmental agency. However, 1989 was also a record year in terms of the depredation of the Brazilian rain-

forests, the dry spells being deliberately used by big farmers and landowners to increase the already astronomic proportions of the burning of the world's richest ecobiome. Estimates given by several international environmental organizations put the total loss at around 3 million hectares — an area which, combined with similar deforestation taking place elsewhere in Latin America, Western Africa, and South-east Asia, is approximately the size of Belgium.

Despite the nomination of Lutzenberger to head up Brazil's environmental agency, and the optimism with which the international community welcomed this initiative, President Mello faces two major challenges. The first is the