

**On The Line: Interactive Preparations for the First Earth Summit** is the first newsletter ever designed for global electronic distribution in a "camera ready" format to be printed from a personal computer. It seeks to integrate the power of electronic communications with the power of desktop publishing, and to place that power in service of the evolving networks of individuals and non-government organizations (NGOs) committed to a humane, sustainable common future.

The principal goals of **On The Line** are: to serve as a guide to the use of on-line resources in preparations for the Earth Summit; and to support strategies that enable the effective, interactive contribution of on-line and microcomputer resources to the Earth Summit.

There are other newsletters that are available on-line; most of those only reach people who are already familiar with the use of electronic communications. **On The Line** is addressed as much to people who have no previous experience with on-line communications, or who have just been introduced to electronic networks.

**On The Line** will seek a balance between an overview of what on-line communications are about, a summary of what is available on-line, and recommendations on how to make effective use of electronic networks -- to obtain information and as a means of communication.

That balance may not always be easy to find, so **On The Line** needs to hear from you, the reader, to know how that balance needs to be adjusted. For **On The Line's** success depends not only on being about interactive processes, it depends as much on an interactive relationship between this publication and those it serves.

## **Strong: Focus on Food, Emergencies, War, Refugees**

*In the Secretary-General's Report (PC/41) Maurice Strong has called on the Preparatory Committee to go beyond the current agenda, and address four critical issues that are "very much within the mandate of the 1992 mandate", as defined in General Assembly Resolution 44/228.*

**Food:** "The current emergency in Sudan and Ethiopia provides dramatic evidence and reminds us that the problem is far from solved. Certain dimensions of this problem are dealt with in the deliberations of the Preparatory Committee on the issue of poverty as also in the issue of agriculture. However, it is perhaps desirable if the issue of food security ... is taken up as a specific item for programmatic action by the Preparatory Committee. It is a matter of great concern to a large number of countries particularly in Africa. The roots of food security at the household or at the local or country level lie both in environmental and developmental factors."

**Emergencies:** "Many other environmental emergencies ... require concerted international action. Some of these may be in the nature of natural disasters like the recent tidal wave which caused havoc in Bangladesh, or the volcanic eruption in the Philippines. Some of these environmental emergencies, however, are the result of human activities like chemical accidents, radiation leaks or oil spills. A certain amount of capacity has been built up for international action in response to such emergencies. There are also several proposals for strengthening the response capacity at the national and international level. It would be worthwhile for the Preparatory Committee to consider this issue of environmental emergencies not just in relation to specific items but as a generic problem which requires an integrated response."

**War:** "Environmental security ... has two dimensions. The first is the possibility that security conflicts could lead to environmental threats and environmental degradation. The impact of the recent war in the Gulf on the local and regional environment has clearly shown that this is an issue of major concern. The other dimension of this is the possibility that environmental degradation and the economic pressures that it generates could become a source of potential conflict. Both of these are matters which require systematic discussion in the Preparatory Committee."

**Refugees:** "An area of concern closely linked to the issues that have been referred to above is that of environmental refugees. It is an issue which is linked to food crisis, to environmental emergencies, and to the links between environment and conflict. This issue deserves greater attention within the broad mandate of this Conference which is considering both environment and development."

*(The quotes are from PC/41, The Secretary-General's Report. The report is available on-line on the **en.unced.documents** conference)*

## Laptops, E-mail & NGO Nomads

For the NGO nomad endlessly traveling from meeting to conference, from one city, one country to another, with all too many hours in an airport or hotel, a laptop or notebook computer with a modem can be the key to increased productivity and to inexpensive, reliable communications with his or her office.

The steadily increasing power -- both in processing speed and in disk size -- and the decreasing cost, of laptop and notebook computers makes it possible to carry a whole library of documents and an extensive address, phone, fax and e-mail directory with one at all times. Time that otherwise might be wasted can be fruitfully spent writing and reviewing correspondence, reports and proposals.

The icing on the cake is the ability to receive mail from wherever you are, as well as to communicate with colleagues via electronic mail or faxes. A home office doesn't even need to know where a key person is in order to keep her posted on urgent matters, and can tell her exactly what she needs to know, rather than "Mr. Strong called, please call him." -- all that is likely to be written on a phone message.

A little calculation will quickly show that any organization with a director or executive who spends a lot of time traveling to meetings and conferences would find it very profitable, measured in terms of time, productivity and accessibility for key decisions, to provide him or her with a laptop, a modem, and some basic training in computer communications.

### ***Production: Technical Information***

*On The Line* is available on the **en.unced.binary** conference on the networks of the Association for Progressive Communications as a typeset **WordPerfect 5.1** document file, and on the **en.unced.news** conference as a text file.

Since WordPerfect documents files are interchangeable between IBM-compatible and Macintosh computers, **On The Line** can be printed using either of the two most widely available types of microcomputers.

**On The Line** is typeset using fonts created with **Bitstream® FaceLift 1.5** that provide a uniform appearance on **Hewlett Packard Laserjet** (or compatible) printers and on the most popular ink jet and dot matrix printers -- including inexpensive 9-pin printers. Alternate "style libraries" are available so that **On The Line** can be printed either in 8.5 x 11" format or on A4 paper. Retrieving an alternate style library is a straightforward process, and instructions are provided on-line.

A WordPerfect 5.1 printer driver with the FaceLift fonts installed is available on line in the **en.unced.binary** conference, so that those who do not have the FaceLift fonts can preview the typeset document on screen, and can

## Patience is still a virtue

The enthusiasm that some visionaries exude about the power, speed, dynamics and opportunities of electronic communications can leave a listener breathless -- or with eyes glazed over. And sometimes that enthusiasm is not sufficiently tempered with the reality that there are still quite a few unresolved problems.

For all the wonders that electronic communications can bring, it is still in its infancy -- or at least in its childhood. The "user interface" is not necessarily as friendly or convenient as you might want; there are new commands to learn. The success of the technology depends on other people using it, and others are still learning. Not everyone checks their electronic mail every day. People are not necessarily any better at replying to electronic mail messages than they are at replying to conventional mail, or at returning phone calls. It is possible to find yourself stranded without a phone jack that fits the local variety.

In theory, communication takes "no time" when you use electronic networks, but you will from time to time find delays -- sometimes one of the APC networks is "down" for a day, or perhaps you can't find a conference that you have been assured exists (it might not have been networked).

More than one electronic communications enthusiast has been known to use the phrase **snail mail** to characterize the slow pace of conventional postage. Perhaps it would be wiser to call it **turtle mail**, in remembrance of Aesop's fable of the turtle and the hare.

## Conceptual Framework & Technicalities

Underlying a transition to the use of electronic communications is the emergence of a fundamentally new conceptual framework to guide our understanding of our relationship to information, and of the nature of our communications with each other. The image of a "global brain" through which we are all connected is one such concept. **On The Line** will be including a **Concept Corner** to highlight some of the key elements that have been contributing to the development of a new conceptual framework.

There are several levels of concepts that are building blocks for this framework. While some of these concepts fall into the category of general ideas, many involve technical aspects of the structure of information, and of the form and dynamics by which information can be communicated electronically, coupled with an understanding of the dynamics with which information is integrated into individual and collective knowledge and behavior.

If the power of electronic communications is to become available on a broad basis -- and not remain the privilege of an elite -- it is essential that a general understanding of the technical elements and processes -- and of the language to describe them -- be widely disseminated, and that as we do that, we don't get lost in an exclusive jargon.

# Speaking Truth to Power -- Voice of the Children

"There are five billion people in the world today, about two billion are children." That opening sentence from the description of the **Voice of the Children** campaign (posted on **en.unced.general** on 7/25/91) should in itself be sufficient reason for everyone involved in the UNCED process to take very special note of this campaign. So should the admonishment from the Great Law of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy that: *"In our every deliberations, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."*

Our children may not be the seventh generation, but it is they, not our elders, who will be living with the consequences of the environment and development policies and decisions that emerge from UNCED. And the eyes of a child tend not to be clouded by preconceptions as to what is "politically acceptable" or "profitable"; what is "right" and "wrong" tend to loom much larger.

**Voice of the Children**, with its theme of **Speaking Truth to Power**, was initially organized in conjunction with the Bergen meetings in May, 1990, and culminated in a presentation by Norwegian children -- mostly aged 10-16 -- to political leaders in Norway, including Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The success of the Bergen event led to the development of an international campaign -- there are presently national campaign coordinators in thirty-three

countries, and to endorsements from the likes of Maurice Strong, Gro Harlem Brundtland, and James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF.

Voice of the Children organizer Kristin Eskeland, however, is clear that no matter how much support there is from "grownups", the key to the success of the campaign depends on children taking the lead. Perhaps ultimately more important to her even than a deeply moving presentation in Rio in the presence of many Heads of State is the prospect of children -- in villages, towns, cities and national capitals -- coming to terms with the issues of environment and development and creating ways of letting their voices be heard in communities around the world.

Contact: Kristin Eskeland, Voice of the Children International Campaign, Langes Gate 4, 0165 Oslo 1, Norway; phone + 47 2 36 20 35; fax + 47 2 36 14 54; e-mail: pns:roestlie, or Raul Montenegro, FUNAM, Casilla de Correo 83, Correo Central, 5000 Cordoba, Argentina; phone: + 54 51 22 62 52; fax: + 54 51 52 02 60.

o o o o o o

*We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors,  
we borrow it from our children.*

## UNCED Conference makes the Top 20

Since the UNCED conferences got off the ground in April 1990, there has been a steady increase in the use of the Association for Progressive Communications networks for UNCED-related information -- with peak activities occurring around the times of the PrepCom meetings.

In May 1991, the **en.unced.general** conference just made it into the Top 20 conferences on the **Institute for Global Communications** -- the only APC Network for which statistics are presently available -- and in June, the last month for which figures are available, **en.unced.general** moved up to 19th place.

While the level of activity in the **en.unced.general** conference has been impressive, the statistics look even better when you begin to examine the extent of usage of the entire family of on-line UNCED-related conferences.

## An Electronic Newsstand -- **en.unced.news**

One of the newer UNCED-related on-line conferences that is steadily growing in popularity is **en.unced.news**. Many who visit the conference regularly are finding that it serves as the equivalent of an electronic newsstand, where you can pick up an edition much earlier than you can get it on the street. In addition, the information on **en.unced.news** tends to be better organized than on many other conferences. *In a striking example of the difference in delivery time, the printed copy of the June 1991 issue of **Network 92** arrived in Baltimore on the very same day that the July issue was available on-line.*

### *Helpful Hints:*

*Do set your conference priorities -- see the article on "Getting priorities straight" for how to do this.*

## North-South Dialogue -- **unced.dialogue**

The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) is administering a "North-South Dialogue" program to strengthen dialogue between NGOs in developed countries with those in developing countries. Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the North-South Dialogue program was launched with a series of meetings with a small group of representatives from Northern and Southern NGOs during PrepCom II.

The use of electronic communications was central to the planning of the North-South Dialogue, and the **unced.dialogue** conference was set up as the forum for the participants in this project. After a fairly slow start -- it often takes a little while for dialogue in a conference to get going -- there has been a steady flow of papers, notably those from Maximo "Junie" Kalaw of the Philippines Green Forum (see separate article) and Sanjit Roy from India.

# UNCED & The Gulf War -- Damage Control or Prevention

As the preparations for war in the Persian Gulf began to escalate, many in the environment and development community expressed deep concern at the impact of the war on the Gulf environment, and on development in the area, as well as its indirect effects on many other developing countries.

At the outbreak of hostilities, Ian Peter in Australia contended that the UNCED agenda would be seriously flawed if it were not amended to address the impact on environment and development of the international framework for resolution of conflict. (See "SERIOUS AGENDA FLAW", posted 1/16/91, in the **en.unced.general** conference).

Meanwhile, a Global Environmental Alliance on Peace in the Gulf had been formed in response to the prospects of the massive oil spills and oil well fires that were predicted to be an almost certain consequence of the war. A resolution on January 23 at the annual conference of the Society for International Development in Washington DC, urging Presidents Bush and Hussein to make use of win-win conflict resolution processes instead of military force, drew wide support.

The Norwegian Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers) adopted a minute -- subsequently supported by many other Quakers -- inviting all Friends to call on

Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development, to raise the issue of peace, environment and development on the UNCED agenda. And the impact on climate and air quality of the Kuwait oil well fires is a major focus of discussion in the **en.climate** conference.

With the publication of PC/72 -- Environmental Assessment of the Gulf Crisis, posted on **en.unced.documents** on 7/26/91, prepared in response to a request from the second session of the PrepCom, the presence of an official UNCED document provides a clearer context for addressing concerns on the impact of war and conflict resolution processes on environment and development, especially given Maurice Strong's recommendation that the issue of environmental security be given a clear place on the UNCED agenda.

However, many will be disappointed unless UNCED takes a far broader view of than the scope of PC/72. For its recommendations are limited to ways of improving international response to the damage that has already been done in the Gulf, and fail to speak to the challenge of developing processes and institutions for resolving conflict in ways other than the use of force, so as to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which ... has brought untold sorrow to mankind" (Preamble to the United Nations Charter).

---

## Coping with Information Overload -- **en.unced.infox**

Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the amount of UNCED-related information? Take a deep breath to relax, and know that the flood of information is not likely to slow down until after June 1992. Relaxation is a valuable tool to respond to the stress that can be induced by information overload. So relax again and know that you are not alone.

The **en.unced.infox** conference was created in recognition of the problem of information overload, and the challenge of helping people find the information they need. It has been a forum for discussion of strategies to make the mass of UNCED-related information more readily available, especially to those who do not have access to computers and sophisticated communications resources.

Much of the discussion leading to the **NGONET '92** project took place in **en.unced.infox**. (see **NGONET** article).

## UNCED-related events -- **en.unced.readit**

Funded by the Dutch and Norwegian governments, and administered by the **Environment & Development Resource Center** in Brussels, the **READIT** project -- Rapid Environment And Development Information Timetable -- is compiling and disseminating a master directory of the growing number of UNCED-related events.

An updated READIT schedule will be posted in early August, on the **en.unced.readit** conference, in a format that will make it easier to find out details about what conferences and meetings will be taking place, on what topics, and who to contact for additional information.

Printed copies of the READIT schedule can be obtained from EDRC at 26 Boulevard Louis Schmidtlaan, 1040 Brussels, Belgium. Phone +32 2 736-8050; fax +32 2 735-8895; e-mail [gn:edrc](mailto:gn:edrc) or [geo2:edrc](mailto:geo2:edrc).

### "Why can't I find it?" Archived topics

*At least one of the APC Networks has begun to "archive" some of the earlier UNCED topics, especially topics that people have not been reading much. If someone has told you there is a particular topic on a conference, and you just can't find it in the index, try typing "a" for archive, then "i" for index, and there is a good chance you will find what you are looking for. You can read an archived document just the same way you read any conference topic; the only difference is that you can't write a response to it.*

***By finding the right place to stand, I can move the world.***  
**Archimedes**

# Overview of PrepCom III Documents

All of the principal documents for PrepCom III are now available in English on 'en.unced.documents'. For those who are hesitant at the prospect of reading the thousand pages or so that make up the documents, the following, referred by their topic title on 'en.unced.documents' -- might be a good place to start. Topic numbers are not given as they are different on some networks (e.g. GreenNet has archived some of the earlier topics on en.unced.documents).

PC/39 Provisional Agenda (66kB)

PC/41 Sec. Gen's. Report (53kB)

PC/42 Agenda-21 (22kB)

Provisional Document List (12kB)

PC-3 Documents Summary -1 (45kB)

PC-3 Documents Summary -2 (49kB)

(see box below for a note on the meaning of "kB")

**PC/41, the Secretary-General's Report** (see lead article for some highlights) may be the best place to start for an overview on what is happening, as seen from the perspective of the UNCED Secretariat. PC/41 gives a review of regional activities, national reports, NGO participation, and a substantial section on the role of information -- in the PrepCom, and on an ongoing basis beyond UNCED -- and a broad overview of the documentation, and the state of preparations in the three Working Groups.

**PC/39**, the proposed agenda for the Geneva meetings, is important reading for anyone who plans to attend the third PrepCom. It gives a fairly detailed overview of the agenda, and identifies when and where the substantive issues and corresponding documents fit on the agenda.

The **Provisional Document List** is not detailed, but it does give a little more insight into the documents than could be gained from just recording the index of the new topics on en.unced.documents.

**PC-3 Documents Summary** is especially useful in that it gives a summary -- between a half page and a full page in length -- of each document. The first part covers PC/42 - PC/54, the second from PC/55 - PC/80. It is not currently possible to download the summaries separately for a given document.

If you are interested in recent developments with Agenda 21, you might want to begin by looking at "PC/42 Agenda-21 (22kB)" which describes the **Agenda-21 Structure and Orientation**, and at the document summaries of PC/42/Add.1 through PC/41/Add.10 in "PC-3 Document Summaries -1". The full text of the addenda to PC/42 were posted on 7/25/91.

Some of the PrepCom III documents have associated tables which could not readily be put into text (ASCII) format. These tables have been posted in a WordPerfect 5.1 format on the 'en.unced.binary' conference.

Finally, it may be useful to review the decisions and reports from **PrepCom II**. There are seven parts, with a table of contents and a mostly pro forma overview, the decisions (in two parts), reports from Working Groups I through III, and a listing of the official documents associated with the Second PrepCom session. These are titled on-line as PrepCom-2: Report; Decisions/A; Decisions/B; WG-I; WG-II; WG-III; & Documents respectively.

## Bytes & Kilobytes (kB)

When referring to the size of a document that is available on-line, it will usually be described in terms of kilobytes, abbreviated as kB. Each byte corresponds to one character -- an "a", "b", or "c" etc. As a rule of thumb, there is an average of five or six characters per word, so a "5 kilobyte" document would typically contain between 850 and 1,000 words. Another way of assessing document size is that about 3 kilobytes makes up about one page of text.

## Helpful Hints:

*To search a conference for a specific title, first go to the end of the conference by issuing the ">" command at the Conf? prompt. Then issue the command ",st" (search by title) and type in the name of the topic exactly as it appears.*

*Don't spend time reading the documents when you are on-line; it doesn't cost anything to read them after you have logged off.*

*Don't hesitate to write to "support" or to the conference facilitator if you have some questions or need help. A little help at the right time makes a lot of difference.*

*When you visit a new conference, look at the (i)ndex of topics. Save it on disk, print it, and browse through it when you are off-line. When you see a topic that interests you, log in again and then download that topic.*

# A quick guide to the UNCED conferences on-line

If you can not find one or more of these conferences on the Association for Progressive Communications network you use, send a note to "support" on your network, and request they be made available.

**ax.unced** -- Spanish and Portuguese language public conference

**cnu.ethics** -- U.S. Citizens Network on UNCED Working Group on Ethics

**cnu.information** -- U.S. Citizens Network on UNCED Clearinghouse and Communications Committee

**cnu.steering** -- U.S. Citizens Network on UNCED Steering and Executive Committee (private)

**cnued.documents** -- Official UNCED documents in French

**cnumad.documentos** -- Official UNCED documents in Spanish

**en.unced** -- introduction and orientation to the UNCED-related conferences

**en.unced.binary** -- Binary files, including "typeset" documents and program files

**en.unced.documents** -- Official UNCED documents in English

**en.unced.general** -- General discussion and NGO documents

**en.unced.inbox** -- Discussion of NGO information strategy

**en.unced.news** -- UNCED-related newsletters and publications

**en.unced.readit** -- Extensive schedule of UNCED-related events

**en.unced.schedule** -- Official UNCED Schedule & some UNCED-related events

**en.unced.topics** -- Overview of UNCED organized by substantive topics

**unced.agenda21** -- Open discussion on Agenda 21 issues

**unced.canada** -- Forum for Canadian NGOs and official Canadian documents

**unced.dialogue** -- South-North dialogue, with a focus on Poverty, Development and Environment issues

**unced.earthcharter** -- Open discussion on Earth Charter issues

**unced.usgovt** -- Dissemination of US Government documents, including the draft US National Report

---

## Some related conferences

**inc.climate** -- Official documents from the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Global Climate Change (INC)

**climate.news** -- Newsletters on climate change, including the ECO newsletter produced during the INC meetings

**en.climate** -- general discussion of climate related issues

**en.energy** -- general discussion of energy issues

---

## On The Line

Interactive Preparations for the First Earth Summit  
801 Homestead Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218-3536 USA

E-mail: [igc.rpollard](mailto:igc.rpollard) & [gn.rpollard](mailto:gn.rpollard) (APC Networks)  
[rpollard@igc.org](mailto:rpollard@igc.org) (Internet & BitNet)

**On The Line: Interactive Preparations for the First Earth Summit** is an independent project that began as a project of **EcoNet / Institute for Global Communications**. The first issue of **On The Line** was made possible through funding from the **John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**.