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DEVELOPMENT AND CO-ORDINATION OF THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS FAMILY

Statement by the ACC on the Problems of the Human Environment

1. General Assembly Resolution 2398 (XXIII) on the Problems of the Human Environment is of the greatest importance to the ACC since a good deal of the work of the specialized agencies and IAEA is concerned directly with one or other of these problems. The activities and programmes of United Nations bodies in the field have been reviewed in the report of the Secretary-General - Problems of the Human Environment (E/4667) - which will be considered by the forty-seventh session of the Economic and Social Council and the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This report has been prepared with the closest collaboration between the United Nations organizations and a number of other appropriate inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.
2. The ACC warmly welcomes the Secretary-General's proposals for the 1972 Conference on the Problems of the Human Environment, particularly the emphasis placed on the need for providing guidelines for action by national governments and international organizations. In this respect the knowledge and experience available in the United Nations organizations can play a very significant role.
3. In welcoming the purpose of the proposed 1972 conference to provide a focus of world attention on problems of the environment the ACC would emphasize that it is important that present activities in the field both at the national and international levels should be intensified and extended without waiting for the conference but in preparation for it. It should also be pointed out while the problems are urgent and difficult a great deal of knowledge and experience for dealing with them is already available.

4. In the continuing and strengthening of the work of the United Nations organizations in the field of the Human Environment the ACC believes there are certain general principles which should guide their activities and programmes. These include the following:

(a) The ultimate goal of the United Nations family of organizations is to ensure peace and prosperity in the world, while promoting the physical, mental and social well-being of man. It can make a major contribution to this end by stimulating and encouraging at the national level the rational use of limited natural resources and the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment. This requires a constant emphasis on the human aspects of the environment.

(b) Although they vary in nature and extent from country to country, there are some problems of the human environment which have global impact; their consequences are of concern to each country regardless of its geographical, social, economic and political situation. These demand intergovernmental co-operation for their solution and must therefore constitute a major area for action by the United Nations organizations.

(c) While many problems of the human environment are direct consequences of mismanagement of resources, and are undesirable side effects of technological and industrial development, the objective of rational management of resources and of integration of technology with human needs and environmental necessities can largely be achieved through appropriate planning and action by national public authorities. Activities by the United Nations organizations in this respect should be planned on this principle.

(d) It must be recognized that many forms of human activity involve significant transformation of the environment, and that certain undesirable consequences of these transformations are unavoidable. In all activities in which they take part the United Nations organizations should attempt to evaluate and minimize such consequences and should help governments define priorities in environmental planning, management and control.

(e) Since a number of environmental problems, such as pollution resulting from industrialization, do not yet occur to a serious degree in developing countries, a major objective of the United Nations organizations should be to help these countries to avoid, in the process of industrialization, the errors in planning management and control which have been experienced by developed countries.

(f) Environmental problems related to industrial, agricultural and urban development often arise from the fact that only quantitative factors are taken into consideration in development programmes and policies: the United Nations organizations should in the future place greater emphasis on the qualitative aspects of development and management in relation to environmental and human values.

(g) Similarly, development projects and programmes are usually considered primarily in the light of their economic consequences: the United Nations organizations have an international responsibility to take fuller account of human aspects and long-term consequences of these projects and programmes.

(h) Rational use of natural resources and improvement of the human environment imply the progressive establishment, or re-establishment, of a dynamic balance and partnership between man and nature: the United Nations organizations should adopt as far as possible an ecological and integrated approach in their activities relating to utilization of resources and environmental management.

(i) Preventive action avoiding mismanagement and degradation of the environment is to be preferred to curative action: the United Nations organizations should promote preventive action and effective application of existing knowledge in dealing with environmental problems while at the same time encouraging further research where necessary.

(j) Success in rational use of the resources and proper management of the human environment can only be achieved through full awareness and co-operation of the people of all nations: an objective of the United Nations organizations should be actively to promote such awareness and a sense of common responsibility and solidarity among all countries in this field. In the long run a great saving not only of human resources but also of economic resources would result from such an approach.

5. The ACC believes that 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 within the United Nations system. It proposes to keep this aspect of the problem under continued review. It believes that such co-operation will be an important factor in accelerating the attack on the problems of the human environment, as well as in preparing for the 1972 conference.