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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED
NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN
ENVIRONMENT
Intergovernmental Working Group on the
Declaration on the Human Environment

REPLIES TO QUESTIONNAIRE OF 21 DECEMBER 1970 CIRCULATED BY THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE IN CONNEXION WITH THE
PREPARATION OF A DRAFT DECLARATION ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Addendum

	<u>Page</u>
REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS	
Finland	2

FINLAND

27 April 1971

1. The Declaration should primarily be inspirational in character and should be concise concentrating on major principles. It should promote international co-operation and be mainly directed to Governments and the other organs responsible for political and economic decision-making. The protection of the human environment should be considered as an essential element in achieving international peace and security.

As the Declaration is to cover an extensive area, it would be advantageous, if the Declaration would consist of two parts. One part would constitute the actual Declaration. The other would thus contain concise detailed recommendations and guidelines for national and international co-operation.

2. The Declaration should focus on the prevention of the misuse of natural resources and stress the ecological aspects in relation to and instead of economic viewpoints in order to avoid the deterioration of the environment and destruction of nature.

The problems of the human environment should be approached from three levels: (1) between States, (2) between individuals and State, (3) between individuals. This should be done in the spirit of the United Nations International Declaration on Human Rights.

3. In case the structure of the Declaration will not be in two parts as is suggested under answer to question one above, a rather extensive preamble is necessary. Consequently, the preamble would become the most important part of the Declaration and, therefore, contain at least the following elements:

- Man's physical, mental and social well-being are dependent on the state of the environment and laws of nature. The survival of mankind depends on the ecological balance of the biosphere and the quantity and the quality of its resources. The ecological balance depends on the diversity of nature.

- The development of science and technology presently causes changes in the relationship between man and the environment. Most natural resources are limited and particularly the renewing resources should be saved and increased for posterity.

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- The present endeavours to raise the standard of living on one hand, and the fast growth of population and accelerating urbanization on the other, have an adverse effect, if it takes place at the expense of the human environment and limited resources, as these on their part put a limit on both consumption and the number of consumers.

- Sound planning and the sensible use of the environment should be seen as a matter of concern to all nations. The significant consequences of changes affecting the human environment ought to be emphasized. The harmful effects which are already known, such as all forms of deterioration and inappropriate use of arable land, detrimental use of maritime resources, increasing pollution, overexploitation of forests, continuous weakening of the conditions for natural means of living, and the futile ruining of virgin nature, must be made known. A policy for the protection of the environment which does not cause changes to nature and endeavours to achieve an unpolluted and healthy environment, i.e. the creation and the securing of a healthy environment for work, habitation and recreation for people, should clearly be presented.

The prevailing great ignorance on matters concerning the human environment should be emphasized. This requires continuous and strong expansion of scientific studies and related projects.

The basic facts about the ecologic systems and their relationship to the question of global nutrition and of the necessity of environmental protection should be given already in elementary schools and continued with higher education.

In the framework of international co-operation every nation should be responsible for acts which have effects even beyond its borders.

4. The composition of the Declaration could be e.g. on three levels:

(a) to emphasize the international responsibility of all entities (States) for the maintenance of ecological balance of the biosphere;

(b) to stress the responsibility of the State in the protection of the environment on its own territory;

(c) to state the basic rights and obligations of the individual.

On these levels the Declaration could consist in substance of the following components:

(1) The objectives of the environmental policy;

(2) The present state of affairs and the analysis of the future;

(3) The necessary steps to be taken in view of the differences between States.

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5. The relationship between development and environment could be presented through different projections which are related with the presently available resources. It should be stressed that neglect of undertaking protection of human environment invariably will lead to simulant economic growth and in time prevent it altogether. The protection of the human environment should be seen as:

- practical-economical, which will aim at the maintenance of an acceptable human environment;
- social, which tries to ensure that the environment may be enjoyed;
- scientific-aesthetic, the purpose being to ensure as varied and rich an environment as conceivable and also to ensure the existence of the ecosystems.

For these global aims it would be important that industrialized countries with high standards of living in co-operation with the developing nations, should pay particular attention to the maintaining of the unpolluted biosphere, as the environment and social and economic activities have basically the same goal - mainly to ensure better living conditions for man.

6. From the factual viewpoint, a definition of the human environment is not essential. If this, however, is considered necessary, the definition could be incorporated in the second, more extensive part of the Declaration as suggested under question number 1. If the definition is included in the Declaration, it should contain the biotic and abiotic, the social and aesthetic elements and processes which directly or indirectly influence man's physical, social and mental well-being, and should have as its starting point the concepts of freedom, justice and equality as embedded in the United Nations International Declaration on Human Rights, and should deal with the relations between men as well as man's relation to his environment.

7. In the Declaration a mention of the rights and obligations as far as the environment is concerned, should also be included. The environment begins immediately beyond man. The right to an unpolluted, unspoiled environment is one of the fundamental human rights. The Declaration should also stress the differences between different entities and the responsibilities of the different levels of national authorities and international organizations as far as the human environment is concerned.

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8. The Declaration should contain principles that States should recognize, in their activities and relations towards individuals as well as other States, and which influence the human environment. When considering such activities the starting point should be that no generation or group of people has the right to cause damage to the environment. Action by States alone is not enough; it should be stressed that all citizens, all people have a responsibility to bear.
