

*executive committee of  
the directing council*



PAN AMERICAN  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION

*working party of  
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WORLD  
HEALTH  
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#### UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations held the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development on 3-14 June in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Delegates from 170 countries participated. The Conference culminated with the most highly attended summit meeting in the history of humankind, a total of 110 Presidents and Heads of State.

During the Conference four documents of great importance were adopted.

The first, the Rio Declaration of on the Environment and Development, establishes a set of ethical principles as a frame of reference for sustained development that considers human beings as the primary concern, including their rights to healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

The second, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is aimed at preventing changes in the Earth's climate and the adverse effects they produce through the stabilization of concentrations of gases that result in a greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. Stabilization should be achieved as soon as possible in order to enable ecosystems to adapt naturally to climatic change, ensure that food production is not threatened, and allow economic development to continue in a sustainable manner. According to the principal commitments made, the countries agree to periodically update, publish, and facilitate national inventories, in addition to carrying out actions and implementing programs designed to reduce anthropogenic emissions greenhouse gases. The Convention also establishes the commitment to return, by the end of the present decade, to 1990 levels of anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol.

The third, the Convention on Biological Diversity, recognizes the intrinsic value of biological diversity and its ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational, and esthetic values, and affirms that the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind, and that States have sovereign rights over their own biological resources. The Convention also demonstrates concern that biological diversity is being significantly reduced by certain specific human activities. The Conference consequently adopted the Convention, whose objectives are "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies, and by appropriate funding."

The fourth is the Adoption of Agreements on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, in which it is established that humankind is at a decisive moment of history, in which we face perpetuation of the disparities between and within the nations, which results in the worsening of poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy and the continuous worsening of the ecosystems on which our well-being depends. Agenda 21 deals with today's pressing problems and also attempts to prepare the world for the challenges of the next century. It reflects a world consensus and a political commitment at the highest level to development and cooperation in the sphere of the environment. Above all, its successful implementation is the responsibility of the governments. National strategies, plans, policies, and processes are of capital importance in achieving the aims of Agenda 21, and international cooperation should support and supplement these national efforts. In this context, the United Nations system has a key function to perform. Other international, regional, and subregional organizations must contribute to this effort. In addition, broader participation of the public and the active participation of the nongovernmental organizations and other groups should be encouraged. Attainment of the objectives of Agenda 21 will require a substantial flow of new and additional financial resources toward the developing countries in order to cover the supplementary expenditures deriving from the measures that will have to be taken to face the world's environmental problems and to accelerate sustained development. Financial resources are also needed to strengthen the ability of the international institutions to implement Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 consists of 40 chapters organized into four parts. Part I contains the preamble of Agenda 21 and the section entitled Social and Economic Dimensions. Part II contains the section entitled Conservation and Management of Resources for

Development. Part III includes the section entitled Strengthening of the Role of the Principal (population) Groups, and finally, Part IV includes the section entitled Means of Execution.

Among the 40 chapters of Agenda 21 the following are of special importance for the health sector:

Protection and Promotion of Health. Chap. 6

Protection of the Atmosphere. Chap. 9

Protection of the Quality and Supply of Freshwater Resources: Application of Integrated Criteria for the Management and Use of Freshwater Resources. Chap. 18

Ecologically Sound Management of Toxic Chemicals, Including the Prevention of the Illicit Traffic of Toxic and Hazardous Products. Chap. 19

Ecologically Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes, Including the Prevention of Illicit International Traffic of Hazardous Wastes. Chap. 20

Ecologically Sound Management of Solid Wastes and Issues Related to Freshwater. Chap. 21.

Inasmuch as the XXIII Pan American Sanitary Conference, held in Washington, D.C., in 1990, adopted Resolution XI on Environmental Protection, a comparative analysis should be made of its relevant recommendations and the recommendations made in the various chapters of Agenda 21. This analysis will be presented during the next meeting of the PAHO Directing Council.