

# CORRESPONDENCE

## Environment Conference

SIR,—I should like you to know how much I appreciated the coverage of the Canberra meeting of SCOPE on September 1–3<sup>1</sup>. I must point out, though, that your correspondent entirely misunderstood the main thrust of my remarks on the question of the organization of environmental activities within the UN system. Far from advocating the creation of a “new agency”, I specifically pointed out that environmental affairs do not lend themselves to the creation of another new specialized agency because they involve the interaction of a number of cause and effect relationships which transcend the traditional boundaries of sectors and institutions. I emphasized that we are still at too early a stage in our consideration of this important question to know what decisions governments will take concerning it at Stockholm. In outlining my own views as to the present state of thinking by governments, I made two points: (1) that some form of continuing machinery will be needed at the international level after the Stockholm Conference to follow up the decisions taken at Stockholm, and (2) that what is required principally is a better means of coordinating and providing a central forum and a concerted sense of direction to the environmental activities of the existing international organizations, rather than a new specialized agency.

I have set out here a list of the criteria which should, in my view, as I said at Canberra, be applied in determining the kind of international organizational arrangements that may be made following the Stockholm Conference. As these have been accepted in principle by the Preparatory Committee of twenty-seven governments set up by the UN General Assembly, and I believe are fully compatible with the views of the UN agencies concerned, they represent a reasonable indication of present thinking on this important subject. (a) Any organizational arrangements should be based first on agreement

about what needs to be done. Until this is reached, no firm decision can be made on the ways and means to be adopted. (b) All functions that can best be performed by existing organizations should be assigned to those organizations, both international and national, most capable of carrying them out effectively. No unnecessary new machinery should be created. (c) It is more logical to consider a network of national, international, functional and sectoral organizations with appropriate linkages and “switchboard” mechanisms, whereby international organizations supplement and complement national organizations, than to think in terms of a global “super agency”. (d) Any action envisaged should allow for the preliminary state of knowledge and understanding of environmental problems, and should be flexible and evolutionary. (e) Governments will want to attach highest priority to the need for coordination and rationalization of the activities and programmes of the various international organizations active in the environmental field. This is essential in order to avoid overlap and duplication and to assure most effective use of scarce resources of money and manpower. (f) Any policy centre that is expected to influence and coordinate the activities of other agencies should not itself have operational functions which in any way compete with the organizations over which it expects to exercise such influence. (g) In the establishment of any additional or new machinery it is essential to provide strong capability at the regional level. (h) The United Nations should be the principal centre for international environmental cooperation. (i) The organization of environmental activities within the United Nations should be so designed as to strengthen and reinforce the entire United Nations system.

While there can be and no doubt will be differences of view both in the UN family and amongst governments concerning the specific decisions which must be taken at Stockholm in applying these criteria, the degree of consensus

that has already been achieved is a hopeful sign that these differences will be resolved successfully. The basic purpose of the preparatory process preceding Stockholm is precisely to enable all the relevant views to be fully discussed and reflected in the decisions governments will be asked to take at Stockholm.

Yours faithfully,

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of the Conference*

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<sup>1</sup>*Nature*, **233**, 81 (1971).

## Responsibility and the US National Academy

SIR,—In the November 5 issue of *Nature* (**234**, 7; 1971) there was a fairly extensive report of the reaction of the National Academy of Sciences to my resignation from that august body. In amplification of that report I would like to make a minor and a major point. The minor point is that I am *in fact* no longer a member of the National Academy, having ceased to be a member on the day of my resignation. Whether the Academy chooses or does not choose to accept my resignation is of no consequence. As I wrote recently to the President, “Membership in a voluntary association demands consent. I have withdrawn my consent”.

The major issue concerns the meaning of responsibility. Apparently reports of the NAS–NRC in the future will carry a disclaimer of responsibility by all members of the Academy except for those who may have actually served on the working committee. It is suggested by your correspondent that this goes some significant way toward meeting my objections to the Academy’s secret research. No one who is not either politically naive or Machiavellian can subscribe to such a view. “Responsibility” means both literally and in practice that one is in a