UNCSTD: Hunger and poverty

The co-existence of the enormous potential of science and technology with the continuing poverty of the developing countries was an outrageous contradiction" which the conscience of the world should no longer tolerate, Mr Bradford Morse, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme told UNCSTD delegates last week.

"Science and technology can, indeed must be used to build a better world for posterity. Yet at the present time in almost every part of this small planet in which all of our futures are invested there is hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and despair" he said.

With UNDP frequently mentioned as one of the UN agencies expected to be made responsible for carrying out in practice many of the conference's eventual recommendations and the agency itself having indicated its willingness to do this Mr Morse's words were listened to with particular interest.

"The choice and utilisation of science and technology have fundamental implications for the pattern and direction of social and economic development in each developing country, and thus for the international distribution of economic activities" he said.

"It is therefore in the interests of the world community, while respecting the various needs and objectives of all nations, to support the efforts of developing countries to strengthen their human resources, institutions and technological capabilities so as to promote broadly-based, increased economic activities. This will inevitably strengthen the foundations for self-reliant economic and social progress, and lead gradually but surely to a more equitable basis for the progress of the world economy as a whole."

Mr Morse said that in June the Governing Council of UNDP had adopted a resolution asking him to take the measures needed, in cooperation with the organisations of the UN system, to enable UNDP to respond "promptly and effectively" to decisions taken at UNCSTD and approved by the general assembly, which may be directed to UNDP.

He had also been empowered to convene a special meeting of the governing council if it proved to be necessary to achieve this. "Thus UNDP is ready to act without delay in following-up the decision of this conference and of the general assembly if it should be called upon to do so", he said.

Mr Morse made no reference to the draft programme of action which had been put

forward by the Group of 77 countries. But he described the broad outlines of what he felt the conference could achieve. These included "agreement on firm financial commitments to make an immediate practical start, and on financial targets for the substantial resource flows needed at a later stage", as well as the establishment "within a definite time-frame of the arrangements necessary to convert such targets into actual internationally supported resource commitments."

David Dickson

Iran criticises Group of 77

Iran is not impressed. In pre-revolution days the Shah's government was hopeful about the outcome of UNCSTD. The hope was to convince the developed countries to transfer technology on more suitable terms, better commercial rates, relax some of the stringent patent laws and obtain agreement for training the local manpower with all projects involving the transfer of technology. Now, according to Dr Ali Barzegar, head of the Iranian delegation, Iran believes nothing can guarantee the transfer of technology on suitable terms.

What Iran, and indeed, what the Third World needs in general, is a science and technology generating independence and not dependence on the West. "Such science and technology cannot be imported, it can evolve", says Dr Barzegar.

In Iran, Islam plays a great part in the policy, priorities and infrastructure of science and technology. How can these priorities be safeguarded with imported technology? How can that infrastructure be imported? asks Dr Barzegar.

Again, technology in Iran must enhance the cultural values of the society and allow these values to realise their full potential. How can Iran import technology that will enhance the cultural values of Iran? That technology can only be 'home grown', it must be the product of the efforts of the Iranian people.

Transfer of technology has little or no role to play in self-development. Under the Shah, Iran obtained technology from the

West at an unparalleled rate. "What did it do for the people of Iran? Turnkey schemes, foreign trained manpower, financial resources, willingness of industrial countries to transfer technology — all this is not sufficient" says Dr Barzegar.

"We had all this in Iran and nothing has happened. In fact there has been a serious debt in terms of pollution, disparity between rich and the poor in Iran, and erosion of our cultural values. So, we can say with conviction that, in the final analysis the third world stands to lose from the transfer of technology."

The belief of the Group of 77 in some type of 'Japanese miracle' is a major fallacy. Even if the Third World societies stood to gain from the transfer of technology it could only be at the expense of their cultural integrity and cultural values. "Is not the Japan of today more close to America, than to its origins?" asks Dr Barzegar.

Ziauddin Sardar

●The Arab Group is presenting a strong protest note to the UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, about the timing of UNCSTD. The conference clashes with Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

Mr Ali Zainul Abedin Farah, a member of the UAF delegation, said that "we like to spend Ramadan with our families, fasting and worshipping". The delegates who have had to attend UNCSTD have been deprived of the blessings of one of the holiest months of the Islamic calendar.

The protest note asks the UN to make sure that such "serious errors" are not repeated in the future.

At their second meeting, the Group also decided that all discussions carried out by the members of the Group should be in Arabic. That means that contributions to plenary sessions and committee meeting from the Arab group will be made in Arabic. The Arab league came prepared for such a resolution as its paper is available only in Arabic.

The Arab Group has made repeated declarations that they stand firmly behind the Group of 77. However, some evidence suggests that there are small factions within the group and that the support for the Group of 77 demands is not unanimous.