

Disarray over declaration

London

THE Second World Climate Conference in Geneva next week will be the scene of frenzied diplomatic activity, as government officials attempt to draft, almost from scratch, the first important international statement on climate change following the completion of the key report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Environment ministers from almost 100 countries are expected to find large sections of the draft text still in dispute when they arrive for their meeting on 6–7 November.

Preliminary negotiations to draft the declaration in Geneva at the end of last month ended with deadlock over almost every important clause. Paul Hohnen, from Greenpeace, who attended last month's drafting meeting as an observer, says the atmosphere was one of "total chaos and confusion".

The declaration will not be legally binding, but is significant because it will set the tone for negotiations towards a climate change convention which will begin in Washington in February 1991. As expected, the United States, backed by Saudi Arabia, is fighting attempts by many European countries to include statements on the need to control carbon dioxide emissions. If some industrialized countries seem unwilling to negotiate preliminary emissions targets, Brazil and other developing countries will hold out strongly against the inclusion in the conference declaration of any firm statements on deforestation. Developing countries are also seeking assurances on technology transfer, and the establishment of a new climate fund, to help poorer countries tackle the climate change problem.

But the United States is worried that the proposed fund will become a 'bottomless pit', sucking in US money.

The ministerial meeting will be the focus of media attention in Geneva, but is preceded by a six-day scientific meeting beginning on 29 October. Indeed, the Second World Climate Conference was originally planned to review ten years of the World Climate Programme (WCP), the major international effort to coordinate climate research, set up in Geneva in 1979 at the First World Climate Conference.

In addition to the now-completed IPCC report, delegates in Geneva also have a new three-volume climate change report from the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) to consider. Jill Jäger, who heads the SEI climate programme, says the report is intended as a complement to IPCC, not an alternative. But she says that the SEI's approach differs from IPCC's by starting with a long-term environmental

target, and then defining the measures needed to get there.

The SEI report argues that the rate of global warming should be kept below 0.1 °C per decade, and that the increase in temperature should not be allowed to exceed 2 °C in total.

"Our target is based on what natural ecosystems can stand", says Jäger. The report argues that this target can be achieved cost-effectively through implementing large-scale programmes of energy efficiency and afforestation, and increas-

CANCER RESEARCH

Uncharitable actions

Washington

SOME of the largest US cancer research charities say that their fund-raising efforts this year continue to be dogged by 'look-alike' charities that spend most of their collections on themselves rather than on research. Such 'charities' may now be costing the cancer research community some \$15–\$20 million each year in lost revenue, says Michael Heron, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society (ACS), the largest US cancer charity.

Shielded by a loophole in US tax law, charities can operate with tax-exempt status for years without diverting more than a small fraction of their proceeds to the research, education or patient services they advertise as their purpose. "A few unscrupulous characters can poison the well for all us", by tainting philanthropy with deceit, Heron says. US charities support nearly \$120 million in cancer research annually but growth has slowed in recent years; in part due to increasing competition from new organizations, many of which spend most of their contributions on further fund-raising.

Some of the worst offenders may spend more than 100 per cent of their donations internally, according to the Virginia-based Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB), which tracks the performance of US charities. Defunct and often under investigation by local authorities or the Internal Revenue Service, such charities may fold, only to re-emerge later under another name and address — often uncannily similar to that of established cancer charities or research organizations.

Of the 11 charities tracked by CBBB, three — the Cancer Fund of America, the Walker Cancer Research Institute and the Pacific West Cancer Fund — "do not meet our standards", says communications director Margret Bower. In 1988, Pacific West managed to spend 112 per cent of the \$1.38 million it received on its own fund-raising (it finished the year more than \$800,000 in debt). Fund-raising

ing the proportion of energy that is generated from solar power and other 'clean' technologies — a package that the SEI estimates could reduce world carbon dioxide emissions by 40 per cent from 1986 levels by 2020.

But many governments will reject the SEI's optimistic analysis of the cost of reducing emissions, and also the strictly ecological criterion chosen to set the initial environmental target: concern over the uncertain effect of global warming on national economies may be a more powerful influence on the forthcoming negotiations than damage to natural ecosystems.

Peter Aldhous

consumed 70 cents of every dollar donated to the Walker Institute in 1988. And the Cancer Fund of America in the same year spent only 28 per cent of its \$7.76 million donations on actual cancer programmes, according to the CBBB statistics.

CBBB standards call for charities to spend no more than 35 per cent of contributions on fund-raising. Last year, fund-raising accounted for only 15 per cent of ACS's contributions. Other cancer charities that pass CBBB standards spend from 6 to 32 per cent of their income on fund-raising. A Cancer Fund spokeswoman says that fund-raising cost were admittedly out of control in the three-year-old organization's first two years, but "we're over the hump now". She claims 1990 figures will be close to CBBB standards.

Many of the charities identified by CBBB use similar tactics in soliciting contributions. In mass mailings, Pacific West and the Walker Institute sent out letters offering a 'sweepstake' with a 'free mystery gift'. In the letter, all recipients were notified that they had won a 'first round [cash] prize'. Closer examination of the letters showed that a minimum \$5 contribution was required to obtain the 'free' gift. In the case of a similar '\$5,000 sweepstake' offered by the Cancer Fund of America, the prize, for most, was a cheque for 10 cents.

All three charities tracked by CBBB are facing legal proceedings in several states, in some case for complaints of "unfair, unconscionable or deceptive methods, acts or practices". But local authorities cannot remove a charity's all-important federal tax-exempt status, which allows donors to write off contributions. Known as a 501(c), the provision is reviewed by the Internal Revenue Service only after it establishes a "spending history", which may take several years. By then, however, the charity may be history, leaving cancer research little, if anything, to remember it by.

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