

17.29 THIRD-WORLD DEBT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BELIEVING that governments and multilateral financial institutions should encourage conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, including an appropriate set of new or increased programmes on institution building, soil conservation, watershed protection, fisheries or forestry management, wildlife utilization, small farmer agriculture, biological diversity protection, the creation and expansion of national parks and biological reserves, and investment in scientific research, as a necessary basis for sustainable socio-economic development;

RECOGNIZING that many developing countries owe debts of unprecedented size to banks, governments and private parties in industrialized countries;

CONCERNED that in most developing countries this indebtedness is increasing with little immediate prospect of repayment, particularly in the low-income countries such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa; CONCERNED FURTHER that conservation expenditures, such as soil, water, fisheries and forest management, endangered species protection, cleaning of water and air, management training and environmental education, often must be postponed in part because of debt-service obligations;

CONCERNED FURTHER that high foreign debt may encourage expansion of cash crop monocultures and livestock grazing on marginal lands in order to sell produce to generate short-term earnings to service this debt;

NOTING that the above undermines the potential for renewable resources management and thus also sustainable economic development, accelerating destruction of tropical forests and other critical ecosystems;

RECALLING the manifesto recently issued by the first meeting of eight Latin American Presidents in Mexico, which referred to debt relief to heavily indebted countries;

AWARE that this debt crisis, unless resolved in the mutual interests of both lending institutions and borrowing countries, will continue to place increasing pressure on developing nations and their environments;

NOTING that a number of governments and financial institutions have taken steps to alleviate debt-burdens by accepting:

- a. reduced interest rates
- b. stretched-out repayments
- c. in certain cases, alleviation of debt burden of low-income countries
- d. conversion of debt to local currency obligations;

The General Assembly of IUCN, at its 17th Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, 1-10 February 1988:

1. REQUESTS the President of IUCN to send a memorandum to the Governments attending the Economic Summit of the Group of Seven in Toronto in June 1988, expressing the concern of the members of IUCN and requesting that governments, in conjunction with multilateral financial institutions, private financial institutions, and conservation groups, provide incentives for sound natural resource management and long-term economic development as elements in current and future debt adjustments.
2. URGES governments and intergovernmental institutions to which debts are owed by low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa to take appropriate steps to alleviate the debt burden of those countries as rapidly as possible.