

From the editor—World Environment Day 2007

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Commemorated every year on 5 June, World Environment Day (WED) was established by the United Nations in 1972 to help stimulate worldwide awareness of the environment and to enhance political engagement in environmental issues. Although the day is marked around the world, the United Nations Environment Programme selects one city to host the main WED celebrations, which are focussed on a central theme encapsulated in a slogan. Past WED host cities have included Algiers (“Don’t desert dry lands”), San Francisco (“Green cities—plan for the planet”), Barcelona (“Wanted! Seas and oceans—dead or alive?”) and Beirut (“Water—two billion people are dying for it”).

This year the honour was bestowed on Tromsø, Norway, and the theme of climate change was expressed in the slogan: “Melting ice—a hot topic?”. A youth film festival, an international children’s art competition, a concert, an ecumenical church service and an interna-

tional conference on climate change are just some of the many diverse activities that took place in Tromsø over the course of several days to commemorate the WED.

The conference took place at the University of Tromsø and was organized by the Norwegian Polar Institute and the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, with the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Nordic

MELTING ICE - A HOT TOPIC?



ask...



a polar bear a farmer an islander an insurer an indigenous person yourself!



WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY • 5 June 2007



Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg addresses the Melting Ice conference. The seated panel are, from left to right: Igor Tsjestin, Secretary General of the World Wide Fund for Nature in Russia; Sheila Watt Cloutier, former President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference; Masoumeh Ebtekar, Head of the Centre for Peace and Environment in Iran; Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme; Archbishop Desmond Tutu; and Erik Solheim, Norwegian Minister of Development. (Photo by S. Gerland, courtesy of the Norwegian Polar Institute Picture Library.)

From the editor

Council of Ministers. The first session commemorated the 20th anniversary of the report *Our common future*, issued by the World Commission on Environment and Development under the leadership of Gro Harlem Brundtland (who has also served as Prime Minister of Norway and Director-General of the World Health Organization). Gro Harlem Brundtland, who is now a United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Change, and Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, delivered the conference's keynote addresses to an audience that included high-level statesmen and prominent environmental and human rights activists, indigenous peoples' representatives and scientists from around the world. Many contributed presentations themselves during the two-day event, creating a stimulating mix of political, humanistic and scientific viewpoints.

Four of the talks given at the conference are reproduced in the following pages, some very close to the form

in which they were originally given and others somewhat modified. These pieces should give the reader a sense of the broad scope of the conference. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, focussed on policy and how it is informed by climate change science. Biologist Philip Wookey considered Arctic biodiversity, and the physician Henning Pedersen discussed human health issues. Geologist/photographer Hinrich Bäsemann touched on many of these topics with his captivating photographic essay, which, regrettably, had to be pared down for publication here because of space constraints.

This issue also includes—as promised in the last issue of *Polar Research*—an article by historian Stian Bones tracing Norway's involvement in past International Polar Years.

Helle V. Goldman
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