BY PAUL G. IRWIN

After more than two years of preparation, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, took place June 3-14 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. One hundred seventy countries were officially represented at the biggest event ever sponsored by the United Nations. One hundred eighteen heads of state attended the meeting, whose goal was to create a new framework (the Earth Charter), comprehensive agenda (Agenda 21), and series of agreements that would protect the environment while at the same time provide the means for human beings to develop fully.

For those of us who work to protect animals through changing international policies, UNCED was a unique opportunity. Never before had the world's political leaders seriously considered a declaration that would recognize the intrinsic value of animals and nature, as well as agendas and treaties that would implement such life-affirming an ethic. We were hopeful that the United Nations would take significant steps to protect animals and the Earth, following the lead of its own recent statements and those of other international groups.

Unfortunately, however, concern for the life and beauty of our planet did not prevail in the deliberations. The Earth Charter, formally titled the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, opens with the assertion that "human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development." In Agenda 21 and various treaties, opportunities for protecting species or habitats were bypassed or ignored. Both the reality and the rhetoric of caring for animals and the Earth were edited out of final versions, as northern, developed countries and southern, developing countries tried to cut deals that would give each the maximum share of natural resources.

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Amidst representatives of indigenous peoples, Sen. Albert Gore speaks in Rio. The HSUS sponsored the IPMC on behalf of CRLE, EarthKind, and HSI.

Despite the disregard for animals demonstrated at UNCED, the meeting represented a giant step forward in creating a global framework to protect animals and the environment. The representatives of 90,000 indigenous organizations and countries to prohibit the exploitation of cetaceans. The text emphasizes the importance of protecting the International Whaling Commission as the appropriate international organization to regulate whaling, which will help address the serious claims by whaling nations, such as Iceland and Norway, that they can form their own whaling organization to regulate commercial whaling.

The preservation of biological diversity requires the preservation of cultural diversity. Many indigenous peoples have lived for thousands of years in ways that enhance the numbers and relationships of plant and animal species in their areas. We can learn from their agriculture, medicine, and Earth-based initiative to aid conservation. At UNCED The HSUS sponsored the Indigenous Peoples Media Center (IPMC) on behalf of CRLE, EarthKind, and HSI. The media center, operating out of the International Press Center, held six press conferences and issued many press releases articulating indigenous perspectives on issues of environment and development. The IPMC, itself, helped facilitate a meeting between delegates of indigenous peoples and representatives of Global Legislator for a Balanced Environment, in- ating respect regardless of its worth to people. Human beings have a special capacity to effect the ecological environment. The awareness of the conse- qences of our actions, we have a special responsibility to preserve life in its integrity and diversity and to avoid destruction and misuse for trivial or merely utilitarian reasons. To do this we must promote food consumption that is lower on the food chain (less energy consumption, as well as food that is organically, humanely, and locally produced and we must protect and, where necessary, restore biological diversity. ‘An Earth Charter: A Religious Perspec- tive,” International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth, 1992

While the HSUS’s booth, shared with EarthKind, HSI, CRLE, and WSPA, served as a source of information on animal-protection issues. Our family of organizations teamed up with representatives of SOZED, a Brazilian animal-protection organization, who answered questions and provided display materials in Portuguese, Brazil’s national language. (Most of the people milling around the booths were Brazilian, groups of schoolchildren, especially, were concerned about the prevalence of animal cruelty in Brazil).

CRLE staff participated in the parlia- mentary Earth Summit, held in Rio June 5-7 as a continuation of meetings begun in previous years in Oxford (England) and Moscow. This conference of members of the world’s parliaments included spiritual leaders, scientists, journalists, artists, and business leaders. His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Senator Gore, Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil, and Kenyan Greenbelt Watterson Mangai Maathai were among the participants. The conference endorsed the Earth Charter of the International Coordi­ nations Committee on Religion and the Earth (ICCRE), which CRLE helped to draft.

The Beach Boys teamed up with Earth­ Kind and the Love Foundation for Ameri­ can Music, Entertainment, and Art to vigorously seek to enhance the environment and global NGOs. This initiative would provide video cameras to NGOs with a story to tell and who need a way to tell it. The Beach Boys have agreed to a concert to raise $100,000 to kick off the effort to put 1,000 broadcast-quality video cameras in the hands of NGOs around the world.


The Read from Rio: A Time for Action

The next few years will see the ex­ pansion of interest in the conservation of species and the deterioration of habitat on much of the planet. We must in­ crease our efforts to stop the assault on the life and to make compassion for all crea­ tures the centerpiece of international agree­ ments. The Earth Summit in Rio set the stage for a series of actions we each can take over the next few years to create a hu­ manist, sustainable, and equitable society.

The HSUS will vigorously seek to en­ sure that humane concerns are part of the treaties dealing with agriculture, forestry, oceans, and other developmental policies. Each of the organizations in our global humane family will be pursuing this agenda.

We will keep our members informed of our efforts to make sure “the road from Rio” does not turn into a dead end.

The Earth is an interdependent com­ munity of life. All parts of this system are connected and interdependent to the functioning of the whole. Life is sustained. Each of the diverse forms of life has in its own inalienable value. Human beings have a special capacity to effect the ecological environment. The awareness of the conse­ quences of our actions, we have a special responsibility to preserve life in its integri­ ty and diversity and to avoid destruction and misuse for trivial or merely utilitarian reasons. To do this we must promote food consumption that is lower on the food chain (less energy consumption, as well as food that is organically, humanely, and locally produced and we must protect and, where necessary, restore biological diversity. “An Earth Charter: A Religious Perspec- tive,” International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth, 1992

The Global Humane Family at Rio

The Global Humane Family is composed of organizations, Humane Society Interna­ tional (HSI), the Center for Respect of Animal Rights (CRLE), EarthKind, the National Association for Respect of Life and Environment (CRLE), and Respect of Life and Environment (CRLE), HSI, EarthKind, and HSI—have launched an international initiative to promote respect regardless of its worth to people. Human beings have a special capacity to effect the ecological environment. The awareness of the conse-