



**U.S. CITIZENS  
NETWORK**  
ON THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE  
ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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A PROJECT OF THE TIDES FOUNDATION

November 12, 1991

Dear Members of the U.S. Citizens Network and interested friends:

As preparations for UNCED intensify, some of you have asked me what to expect from the Rio conference. Since I have been working with an international coordinating group to plan one of the parallel events for next June ("NGO/Social Movements Gathering"), I have been giving this subject a lot of thought. For what it's worth, this is my thumbnail sketch:

**THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK FOR RIO MUST BE DONE IN THE UNITED STATES TO CHANGE OUR GOVERNMENT'S POLICY. COME TO THE NEW YORK PREPCOM! IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, RIO IS DEFINITELY TOO LATE.**

a) As you know, the U.S. is blocking agreements on most of the important issues of UNCED. Our job is to generate enough pressure so that the "good guys" in the Administration can prevail against the "forces of evil", before the March PrepCom. If we fail, much of the potential of UNCED will be lost.

b) The official conference in Brazil will consist of a set of speeches, now scheduled to take up about 7 of the 10 working days. One or two days will be left for signing ceremonies. There will be little lobbying opportunity, because most of the issues will be decided beforehand (either at the New York PrepCom or in a special session in May), and the Brazilian Government says there are no facilities available for negotiation sessions.

c) In Rio itself, despite heroic efforts by many people, logistics will be very difficult. For example, the official meeting place is almost 40 km. away from the NGOs site in the center of the city. Shuttles are being planned (cost will be included in the NGO registration fee) but it takes about an hour each way. So NGOs who are on the official delegations and those who want to enter the official conference as "observers" for lobbying purposes will be quite cut off from the other NGOs at the parallel events in town, and will face an unpleasant commute.

d) Only NGOs accredited as observers to UNCED before the start of the New York PrepCom, or having ECOSOC (UN consultative) status already, and of course those on the government delegations, will be able to get into the official site. Moreover, there will be a limit on the number allowed into the conference center each day, probably less than those that are accredited (perhaps only 500 - 800). On the days when heads of state may show up to sign agreements, the NGO limits will be even tighter. Selection of who gets in may be chaotic (traumatic?).

So whether to come to Rio depends upon what you hope to accomplish. If you want to affect how our government represents us, you will have little access and it will be too late. If you simply want to be there to witness an historic moment, not many of us will be allowed into the official hall on the day when the heads of state will sign whatever agreements are reached.

Many people will come to join with others from around the world to make a statement about how much we care for the earth. Whether the parallel events will be satisfactory in that respect is at the time unknown.

a) No one knows how many will come for the unofficial events (estimates range from 10,000 to 30,000), therefore it has been very difficult to plan. That is why the job of providing a venue for the NGOs was separated from the planning for actual seminars, conferences, or exhibitions. The booklet you have just received called "Information on the '92 Global Forum" is a miracle of efficiency and hard work by W.H. "Chip" Lindner and Tony Gross, who are working on the venue. They have arranged for meeting and hotel space, donations of office equipment, and more, all in a few short months. But remember that the Global Forum is the name for the whole space that Chip and Tony are setting up for everyone who comes for whatever purpose; i.e. sites and services, not content. Whether the events are interesting or worthwhile is up to the people who make them happen.

b) So far, groups have applied for space for at least 126 separate workshops, exhibits or film showings. Many are planned to be quite small, (say 50 to 200 people) and while they may be technically "open" to the public, there will be limited space. Women, indigenous people and activist NGOs all plan for large meetings, perhaps 1-2000 people. But what if 5,000 want to come?

c) Rio has less than 13,000 hotel rooms, about 8,000 of which have been reserved for the government delegations. Chip and Tony have blocked 1,800 rooms but since no one knows how many NGOs are coming, get your reservations into their office early.

d) The meeting I am working on grew out of a series of discussions among NGOs at PrepCom 3, to have a conference for non-profit groups who are interested in social change. The purposes would be: to monitor and critique UNCED, to figure out a way to coordinate better in the future (i.e. to hold government feet to the fire after UNCED), and confront our North/South differences. It could be a great meeting. But we have no money and therefore no organizing staff, and it's already November.

e) Rio is a spectacular city of contrasts, conspicuous wealth intertwined with heartrending poverty. You can really see the effects of the debt crisis there. Beautiful, if you can look beyond the garbage and pollution, deafening traffic, and the miserable lives of the street children, of whom there are millions just in Rio (10 to 12 million in the whole country). There has been a lot of controversy in Brazil over what to do about the children when we arrive, because they are associated with crime. Even without the pressure to "clean up" the city for the Eco tourists, many are shot by vigilantes, security guards, and even the police. Chip and Tony are working with Brazilian advocacy groups to work out with the government humane ways to address this problem without causing more violence.

Stay tuned for more news.

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