

UNESCO NEWS



July 20, 1997 Vol. 4, No. 4

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. New York/Washington, D.C. Offices



UNESCO, Columbia University and the Smithsonian Institution Sign Agreement on Environmental Research

New York - UNESCO, The Smithsonian Institution and Columbia University signed on June 23 an agreement to collaborate in research, training and other activities that will encourage economic development consistent with preserving the environment and biodiversity.

The terms call for Columbia to establish an International Institute for Biosphere and Society (IIBS) in cooperation with the Smithsonian and UNESCO. Professor Graciela Chichilnisky, UNESCO Chair in Economics and Mathematics and Director of Columbia's Program on Information and Resources, will be IIBS Director.

The agreement brings together the Smithsonian's expertise in the biological sciences, Columbia University's strengths in economics and the geophysical and social sciences and UNESCO's expertise gained from its Man and Biosphere (MAB) program's global network of more than 300 biosphere reserves.

The accord was signed by Director-General Federico Mayor, Columbia Provost Jonathan Cole and Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, counselor to the Smithsonian for biodiversity and environmental affairs. Timothy Wirth, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, attended the event.

Since its creation more than 50

years ago, UNESCO has been committed to the study of "how to make human economic activity compatible with respect for nature," Mr. Mayor said.

He recalled that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (now known as the World Conservation Union) was founded at UNESCO and the Organization also developed the concept of biosphere reserves, which became the Man and Biosphere Program.

Mr. Mayor added that its UNITWIN and UNESCO Chairs programs were created specifically to aid in the "rapid transfer of knowledge" between industrialized and developing countries.

Undersecretary Wirth noted the "remarkable contribution" that scientists have made to the understanding of environmental and climate change and said



Director-General Federico Mayor (left) shakes hands with Dr. Thomas Lovejoy of the Smithsonian Institution (center) and Columbia University Provost Jonathan Cole after they signed an agreement for their three institutions to cooperate on projects to encourage economic development consistent with environmental preservation.

the new institute "would be terribly important" in furthering this knowledge.

"The next century will be the century of biology and the wealth of nations will be based on biological resources," said Dr. Lovejoy. "We look forward to making positive contributions jointly."

IIBS will "bridge" the social and physical sciences," and examine "how to contribute to the economy and improve the human condition while nurturing the environment," stated Provost Cole.