

Foreword

From the time that human beings first appeared upon the earth they have affected the environments in which they have lived. As time passed, as their technologies expanded to include agriculture and metallurgy, and as human population grew and spread to all continents, environmental changes brought about by human activity accelerated. Large continental areas were deforested, mountains were covered by terraces, rivers were diverted to make deserts bloom. Such changes, although profound, nevertheless were brought about very slowly when compared with the life expectancy of an individual. For the most part humans died in environments which were much the same as those in which they had been born.

As the pace of technological change quickened, so did the pace of environmental change. Today we see dramatic changes taking place virtually everywhere on earth – on the land, in the oceans, and in the atmosphere. All people in all parts of the world are being affected in varying degrees by environmental changes which are being caused by human activity.

The International Council of Scientific Unions was one of the first major international bodies of scientists to recognize that a number of the environmental changes which are taking place could well be confronting humanity with unprecedented dangers. After much discussion the decision was made to create the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE). The new Committee was charged with the obligation of surveying environmental changes which are taking place, of making recommendations for international research programmes aimed at better understanding those changes, and of suggesting ways and means of lessening environmental hazards to human beings everywhere.

SCOPE has done its work well. The cadres of scientists from all parts of the world who have volunteered for this effort have given generously of their time, energy, and wisdom in order to produce this major report. I had the good fortune of playing a role in the creation of SCOPE so it was with some feeling of pride that I found myself President of ICSU during the final two years of this effort.

I know that the past and present officers of both SCOPE and ICSU join me in the hope that this report will be read and acted upon by people in all parts of the world and that in some measure it will contribute to a better understanding of some of these serious problems which confront us all.

Harrison Brown
President of ICSU, 1974 –1976

