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ABSTRACTS OF THE XXIII SESSION OF ACAST
(Geneva, 7-18 November 1977)

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2091
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2097
2098
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2100



INDEX

	<u>Page</u>
1. The Regional Meetings	1
2. The Conference and the Human Rights	1
3. The Conference, Education and Training	1
4. The Conference and the Selection of Five Subject Areas	2
5. Suggestions Regarding Involvement of the Scientific and Technological Community in Preparations for the Conference	3
6. The Working Documents that Will Be Placed before the Conference	4
7. Documents of ACAST that Can Assist Governments in the Preparation of National and Regional Reports	4
8. Implication of the Expression Science and Technology for Development	4
9. General Contributions of ACAST, the Scientific and Technological Communities and of the Non-Governmental Organizations in the Preparation for the Conference	5

10

11

12

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1. The Regional Meetings

With regard to the regional preparatory meetings for the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD), ACAST suggested that these meetings should not be confined exclusively to a given region but that countries from other regions should be invited as observers. These meetings, as well as the subregional seminars, should be of a high professional level and, obviously, should play an important role in the preparatory phase of the Conference; the purpose being to discuss at the conceptual level the management of the inter-actions between science and technology and development, as well as the inter-actions that should exist between the application of science and technology for development and the government officials in charge of decision making regarding the application of science and technology in each country.

2. The Conference and the Human Rights

During the XXIII Meeting of ACAST the relations existing between the human rights and the access to knowledge on science and technology as well as its impact in the development of the developing countries was discussed. It was suggested that in the Preparatory Committee for the Conference the human rights to be taken into account in connection with all agenda items of the Conference; also, that the Secretary General, through the division of Human Rights, prepared a report, as a background paper of the Conference, on the entire range of implications for human rights of advances in science and technology within the context of the purposes of the Conference.

3. The Conference, Education and Training

Stress was placed on the inadequacy of many of the teaching practices in the area of science and technology which are currently being used in a large number of developing countries, the advisory committee (ACAST) felt

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that due attention should be paid both during the preparatory process and the documentation for the Conference to the whole area of education and training. ACAST also felt that it is important to seek out arrangements which would ensure a better mix and social structuring of academics, technicians, machinists and labourers; it was felt that every attempt should be made during the preparation of the Conference to give adequate attention to these issues.

4. The Conference and the Selection of Five Subject Areas

Regarding the selection and use of the subject areas, the Advisory Committee (ACAST) expressed some scepticism as to whether it will be possible for five subject areas, which are to be selected by the Preparatory Committee at its second session in January-February, 1978 to be used by governments in the preparation of national papers. The Advisory Committee noted that given the time frame within which the national papers are being prepared, the May, 1978 deadline for their submission, and the fact that no decision will be made on the five subject areas until January-February 1978, it is unlikely that many governments will be able to take the subject areas into account for the preparation of their national papers. As a result, the subject areas would undoubtedly have less importance in the preparation of the national report than originally envisaged.

The role at the regional level in the preparatory process for the Conference was given considerable attention by the Advisory Committee. In this regard, the committee stressed the fact that if the regional meetings are to take place as planned in mid-1978 and if regional papers are to be prepared for these meetings, then realistically it was going to be virtually impossible for the content of the national reports, which will only be available in May 1978, to be taken into account in the preparation of the regional reports. This essentially meant that the preparation of the regional reports and the documents for the regional meetings should be viewed as one which would be taking place in parallel with the preparation by governments of the national reports.

5. Suggestions

5. Suggestions Regarding Involvement of the Scientific and Technological Community in Preparations for the Conference

At its XXII Session, the Advisory Committee (ACAST) emphasized that during the preparatory period it is essential to involve the scientific and technological communities of each country in the discussions of issues covered by the agenda of the Conference. This can be achieved, inter alia, by inviting the national science and technology councils, universities, national academies of science, scientific associations, research institutes, and other institutions of higher learning, to take an active part in consultations, seminars and similar meetings, to assist the National Focal points in the preparation of the national reports. It is particularly important that representatives of universities, academies of science, scientific associations or individual scientists and technicians should be included in the national delegations.

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) was also stressed and it was recommended that the more concerned non-governmental organizations should be specifically invited to assist in the preparations for the Conference.

At its XXIII Session, considerable attention was given by the Advisory Committee to how to achieve an effective inter-action between the politicians and government decision-makers and the scientific and technological community and NGO's. In answer to questions from the members of the Advisory Committee, the Secretary General of the Conference expressed the view that he felt the involvement of the scientific and technological community at large was part of a two-step process. To begin with, it was going to be necessary to obtain the participation of scientists and technologists in the key issues which are going to be the subject of consideration at the Conference, and then it was going to be necessary to bring in again the scientific and technological community in order to help distill the several inputs and assist in global policy formulation.

6. The Working Documents that Will Be Placed before
the Conference

During the XXIII Session of the Advisory Committee, the Secretary General of the Conference presented in a brief summary the documentation that would be placed before the Conference itself. This would essentially consist of:

- i) Official documents for each agenda item, as well as the programme of action prepared by the Secretariat of the Conference and based mainly on the national and regional reports.
- ii) National and regional reports.
- iii) Documents prepared by international organizations and NGO's (background papers).
- iv) Up-dated world and regional plan of actions.
- v) Report of the United Nations science and technology policy.

7. Documents of ACAST that Can Assist Governments in the
Preparation of National and Regional Reports

During XXIII Session of ACAST, it was announced that the Advisory Committee has background documents relevant to each of the five agenda items of the Conference that can assist the governments in the preparation of their national reports as well as for the formulation of the regional reports; these documents will be available to governments upon request.

8. Implication of the Expression Science and Technology
for Development

In general, it was the view of the Advisory Committee (ACAST) that the term "Application of Science and Technology to Development" is essentially a misnomer since science and technology is an essential and important part of development. The real problem consists in seeking out ways of gaining some degree of control over science and technology and through this over the development process. In this context, stress was placed by the Secretary General of the Conference on the fact that there are a number of forms in which development can take place:

/1) Development

i) Development or growth can take place using existing science and technology through, for instance, increases in production, use of resources and better management.

ii) Development can take place by multiplying production or manufacturing facilities.

iii) Development can take place using innovation and introducing new science and technology.

The Secretary General felt that it was this third form of development to which the Conference is being addressed, particularly the role science in development.

9. General Contributions of ACAST, the Scientific and Technological Communities and of the Non-Governmental Organizations in the Preparation for the Conference

At its XXIII Session, the Advisory Committee (ACAST) considered the specific contribution that the Committee as a whole, as well as its members in their individual capacity could make in the preparations for the Conference. In this context, the Advisory Committee recalled that its participation had been requested in resolutions 2028 (LXI), 2033 (LXI) and 2035 (LXI) of the Economic and Social Council, resolution 31/184 of the General Assembly, resolution C of the III Session of the Committee of Science and Technology for Development, resolution 1 (I) of the I Session of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference.^{1/}

In answer to questions from the Advisory Committee regarding their participation in the preparatory process of the Conference, the Secretary General indicated that he did not view the role of the Advisory Committee as being purely passive or, in other words, one which would only come into play on the request of either himself or the Preparatory Committee. He would also welcome at all times the suggestions and initiatives of the Committee in relation to the preparations of the Conference. The Secretary General of the Conference also felt that one of the major contributions which the Advisory Committee could make would be in trying

^{1/} See document A/32/43, Annex I.

bridge the gap between the scientific and technological community -very largely represented by the members of the committee itself- and the politicians and government decision-makers.

As requested by the Secretary General of the Conference, an ad hoc working group should be convened in January 1978 to assist the Secretary General of the Conference in delineating and making recommendations to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference concerning the five subject areas; the regional groups of the Advisory Committee could be convened during the second quarter of 1978 to assist the regional commissions in drafting the regional documents and regional reports which are to be submitted to the regional meetings taking place in mid-1978.

At the national level individual members of the Advisory Committee could provide advice and assistance to their own governments in the preparation of the national reports. Additionally, members could advise on and assist in generally mobilizing the interest of the scientific and technological community and in participating in seminars and topical meetings at the national, subregional, regional and international levels. During the XXIII Session of the Advisory Committee, it was strongly emphasized the need for scientists to participate actively in the Conference itself and in the preparatory process, if the Conference was to be a success. As a result, the Advisory Committee urges that the governments should ensure that scientists participate actively in the Conference and in the sessions of the Preparatory Committee. In the national preparations they should play a leading role in the preparation of national reports and should also be involved in regional meetings in mobilizing the scientific and technological community as well as in the preparation of the official conference documents for the five agenda items and also should participate in the up-dating the programme of action at regional levels.

The Advisory Committee appreciated the assurance of the Secretary General of the Conference that the rules and procedures should make provision for the widest possible participation of the scientific committee at both the official and observer levels in the Conference which would facilitate the participation also of the non-governmental and other regional organizations.

/The Advisory

The Advisory Committee stands ready to advise the Secretary General of the Conference on the participation of a number of leading non-governmental organizations and it has agreed to establish an ad hoc group for this purpose.

The Secretary General of the Conference requested ACAST to be in charge of making the necessary contacts, through a standing group designated by ACAST, with the non-governmental organizations in order to monitor their involvement in the Conference itself and its preparatory process. Such a group will be serviced by the Advisory Committee's Secretariat under the understanding that the Secretary General of the Conference and the specialized agencies as well as other concerned bodies of the United Nations may retain the possibility of direct contacts with NGO's whenever appropriate.

