



Fall 1983

World Climate Change: The Role of International Law and Institutions, Ved P. Nanda, Ed.

James N. Corbridge Jr.

Recommended Citation

James N. Corbridge Jr., *World Climate Change: The Role of International Law and Institutions*, Ved P. Nanda, Ed., 23 NAT. RES. J. 943 (1983).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol23/iss4/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Natural Resources Journal by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

WORLD CLIMATE CHANGE: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INSTITUTIONS

VED P. NANDA, Ed.

Boulder: Westview Press. 1983. Pp. 264. \$20.

World Climate Change: The Role of International Law and Institutions, is a collection of papers on global climate problems prepared for a two-day conference held in 1980 at the University of Denver College of Law. The papers, authored by climate experts from a variety of disciplines, describe and evaluate the present state of our efforts to reduce or adapt to manmade stresses on the global environment.

These impacts are the result of both intentional and inadvertent climate modification. In the former category fall such programs as precipitation enhancement, airport fog dispersal, and hail suppression. While such weather alteration activities present potential problems, they have not yet developed into serious environmental disturbances, and they receive only minor attention in this book.

Of far greater significance are the unintended consequences to the world climate, caused primarily by activities associated with economic development, and including increased levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere, changes in the ozone layer from the release of chlorofluorocarbons, and acid rain aggravated by industrial sulphur dioxide (SO₂) pollution.

Increased atmospheric CO₂ has been traced to two major sources, combustion of fossil fuels for energy production and the conversion of much of the world's forested land to agricultural use. Because CO₂ is an important absorber of heat radiation from the earth, its buildup in the atmosphere creates a "greenhouse" effect that is predicted to raise global average temperatures significantly over the next fifty to seventy-five years, especially in the higher latitudes. While one result might be some melting of polar ice and a rise in ocean water levels, a more likely scenario is a shift in worldwide agricultural productivity with resulting effects on the international economic environment.

The release into the stratosphere of chlorofluorocarbons, best known as propellants in aerosol spray cans, creates a similar effect. By damaging the ozone layer and thereby increasing the ultraviolet radiation that reaches the surface of the earth, these chemicals further exacerbate the warming trend already induced by higher CO₂ levels.

The acid rain phenomenon is associated with the release of SO₂ into the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels. Tall smokestacks have changed a local problem into an international one. The effects of acid

rain on fish life and on the stone surfaces of buildings have now been well documented and have stimulated widespread concern.

In 1972, the United Nations convened its historic Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Principle 21 of the Declaration developed by the Conference reflected an underlying conflict between economic development and environmental management:

States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of International law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to insure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states, or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

The challenge lies in translating this ambivalent statement of principle into an effective mechanism for the protection of the global environment. Since Stockholm, a good deal of attention has been devoted to identifying international institutions to accomplish this task and international legal principles with which to accomplish it. The results are reported in this collection of papers. Substantial progress has been made in research on climate problems and in the international exchange of data regarding climate change and its impacts. New institutions, such as the United Nations Environment Programme, have been created to coordinate efforts at climate management, while existing institutions such as the World Meteorological Organization have given a high priority to the study of climate change.

Progress on the international law front has been less encouraging, however, and there has been little movement toward the acceptance by individual nations of enforceable remedies for global pollution. This sluggish pace is no doubt attributable to the conflict illustrated by the Stockholm Declaration: the poorer nations are unwilling to forego industrial and economic development in the interest of global pollution control. Even developed nations have demonstrated a marked reluctance to impair their economic competitiveness by, for instance, substantially reducing SO₂ discharges into the atmosphere.

Most of the contributors to this book concede that existing international legal institutions are unlikely to resolve global climate problems in the near future. They stress the importance of further research and efforts at increased public awareness of the problem. Several encourage the development of adaptive techniques to prepare for what they see as inevitable changes in the global environment. Walter Orr Roberts describes this process in his foreword to the book as "build[ing] agriculture and other human systems with an eye to making them more resilient to climate anomalies."

World Climate Change suffers from a problem common to edited collections of papers prepared for a conference: little attention is paid to prior coordination of the contributions and, as a result, the papers are occasionally repetitious. The reader is told several times about the predicted climatic changes and the institutional arrangements that have been devised to monitor and meet them. The book also, in my opinion, devotes too little attention to the economic impacts of climate modification, which may provide the greatest incentive for nations to work together in this area.

Despite these minor faults, this is an important book which deals with problems of critical significance to the human race. It brings together the thinking of a group of diverse scholars, all of whom are concerned about the future of our planet. Their thoughts should receive widespread attention.

JAMES N. CORBRIDGE, JR.

School of Law
University of Colorado