



**COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW**

**Nick Robinson to chair WEC**

The World Environment Center's Board of Directors has elected Professor Nicholas Robinson as its Chair. Nick Robinson is Deputy Chair of CEL.

Founded in 1974, WEC is an independent, not-for-profit, non-advocacy organisation based in New York. It is dedicated to the worldwide exchange of information and expertise on sound environmental practices among industry, government and non-governmental organisations. Among Nick Robinson's greatest challenges, he says, will be "to accommodate the unprecedented increase in requests for WEC services, especially from developing countries and countries with economies in transition."

**Public participation in environmental decisions**

Last year's Luzern Ministerial Declaration called on the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to elaborate proposals for legal, regulatory, and administrative mechanisms for public participation in environmental decision-making, and to increase the ability of the public to effectively use environmental in-

formation. Since then, senior ECE environmental advisors expressed the view that the adoption of comprehensive guidelines at a high political level was urgently needed.

An informal **Task Force on Environmental Rights and Obligations**, led by the Netherlands, met for the first time in Geneva on 23-25 February 1994. A number of experts from Member State governments and NGOs attended in their personal capacities. Wolfgang Burhenne, a member of the Law Commission, was among them.

The Task Force succeeded in elaborating elements which might be included in the proposed guidelines. These elements include rights of access to information as well as obligations to provide information; public access to administrative, judicial, and quasi-judicial proceedings; and rights and scope of public participation in the decision-making process.

According to Dr Burhenne the prospect of such guidelines is an extremely important development and represents a concrete application of Chapter 27 of Agenda 21. If implemented effectively, they will be of great consequence to national policy. "Even though this initiative is formally limited to the context of ECE," Dr Burhenne explained, "any guidelines adopted in that forum are bound to have a profound global influence."

The Task Force plans to hold a second session during the second half of 1994.



**SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION**

**Sumatran rhino nears extinction**

The Sumatran rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* may now be the most endangered of all rhinoceros species.

Fewer than 500 Sumatran rhinos are now believed to exist in very small and fragmented populations, mostly in Indonesia and Malaysia, with a few in Myanmar and perhaps Thailand. Previous estimates from 1984 had suggested that there were as many as 1000 Sumatran rhinos living in the wild.

The latest figures were officially disclosed at a meeting of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) of SSC, and have emerged from more intensive surveys in Malaysia and Indonesia.

This decline has occurred despite significant efforts on the part of both Malaysia and Indonesia to protect this dwindling species. While habitat loss is more of a problem for the Sumatran rhino than it is for most other rhino species, poaching is responsible for nearly all of the decline in its populations, which are now fragmented and isolated.

The largest change in numbers has been in Indonesia, as revealed during a Population and Habitat Viability Analysis Workshop conducted jointly by the Indonesian Department of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation and the Captive Breeding Specialist Group of IUCN/SSC.

The plight of the Sumatran rhino reflects the dire status of the three species of Asian rhinos. News of the extinction crisis for rhinos has centred on Africa's black rhino, which has declined 97% in the last 20 years. However, there are still as many black rhinos in Africa as there are rhinos of all three Asian species combined.

Conservation of Sumatran rhinos will require even greater effort and resources than before. Unfortunately, the safeguard of captive breeding has not been successful for this species.

IUCN/SSC, WWF and the International Rhino Foundation are working closely with the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia on intensified protection for the species.

For more information, contact Simon Stuart, IUCN/SSC, IUCN Headquarters.



Four-year-old Sumatran rhino eating papaya in a Jakarta zoo. Soon zoos may be the only place these animals can be found. WWF/S.Yorath