

Index to The Tommy Koh Earth Summit Collection

Introduction

In 2011, Prof Tommy Koh donated to the ISEAS Library an extensive collection of his private papers which had been accumulated over his long and distinguished career as a diplomat, not only for Singapore but also for the United Nations. This eCatalogue features documents from the period when Prof Koh was the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee (also known as PrepCom) of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

UNCED, which was also popularly known as the Earth Summit, was convened in June 1992 to address global environmental and development issues and to adopt an action plan to deal with them. It was the first major international effort to address the two issues of environment and development together. Before the conference could take place, there was the necessary and very important administrative step of establishing a preparatory committee.

This preparatory committee oversaw the important and essential pre-conference process to negotiate conference issues and seek consensus to bring them as close to agreement as possible so that when the world leaders met at the conference itself, they would be able to approve the pre-negotiated documents. At the PrepCom's organizational meeting in 1990, Prof Koh was elected chairman and the work of the committee was divided among three working groups and a plenary.

Over the two years that followed, the PrepCom held four substantive meetings with each one lasting several weeks. Intense negotiations were conducted over environmental and developmental issues that included the protection of the atmosphere; protection and management of land resources; conservation of biological diversity; protection of the ocean; sea and coastal areas and freshwater resources; management of wastes; legal and institutional matters; financial assistance to developing countries for environmentally sound development; transfer of technology; and living conditions of the poor.

Prof Koh was also the Chairman of the Main Committee at the Earth Summit and chaired meetings that ran overnight, right up to the eve of the Earth Summit. The intensity of the negotiations, both official and off-stage, at the PrepCom meetings and the Main Committee meetings displayed the tremendous task of organising the work of the PrepCom and achieving consensus among many delegations. The hard-won consensus led to the signing of several major instruments at UNCED which was attended by 178 country representatives and over 100 heads of state. Two of the major instruments signed were the Rio Declaration which was a statement of principles, and Agenda 21, "the first negotiated multi-lateral action plan". One scholar writes that, "the UNCED would never have transpired without this PrepCom."

The documents in this collection are arranged in 7 groups according to the record types as reflected in the titles of these groups. Brief notes to each group are provided.

Click the link to view the content descriptions for each group.

Group No	Record Group Title	Period
Group 1	PrepCom Documents	1972-1994
Group 2	Preparatory Work by Organisations & Countries	1987-2000
Group 3	International Meetings and Conferences	1984-1995
Group 4	Magazines/Journals/Books	1963-1998
Group 5	Personal Notes	1990-1992
Group 6	Environmental Law and Education	1989-1998
Group 7	Singapore's Environment	1989-1996

[1] Nicholas A. Robinson, Parvez Hassan, Françoise Burhenne-Guilmin, *Agenda 21 & the UNCED Proceedings* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1992), v.

[2] Shanna L. Halpern, "The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: Process and Documentation", accessed 26 August 2019, <http://www.ciesin.org/docs/008-585/unced-intro.html>