Strong, Maurice Canadian Environmental Advocate; First Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (1929-) Encyclopedia Article

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Strong, Maurice Canadian Environmental Advocate; First Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (1929–)

No single international civil servant has contributed more to global attention to environmental problems, including those relating to air and water pollution, than has Maurice F. Strong. Born in Manitoba, Canada, by the age of twenty-two Strong had acquired a small fortune from the Alberta oil boom. His lifelong ambition, however, was public service. After serving as director-general of the Canadian External Aid Office (later the Canadian International Development Agency), he agreed to head the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972). As conference secretary-general and United Nations (UN) undersecretary-general for environmental affairs, he began his lifelong quest to focus the world's attention on a future environmental catastrophe. He sought to reconcile environmental concerns with development needs and the need of the present generation for sustainable growth with the necessity of leaving a clean environment for future generations. Knowing that the key to successful conferences was their follow up, he agreed to serve as the first executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (1973 to 1975). In 1992, the Canadian government nominated him as secretary-general of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), commonly known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In both global environmental conferences, he encouraged participation by nongovernmental organizations.

Maurice Strong. (©Robert Patrick/Corbis. Reproduced by permission.)

In his capacity as undersecretary-general and senior advisor to the UN secretary-general, Strong is assisting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in reforming the United Nations (something he has long advocated) and serving as a member of the Commission on Global Governance (1992 to 1996). In his 2000 best-selling autobiography, *Where on Earth Are We Going?*, he vowed to continue his lifelong quest.

Bibliography

Strong, Maurice (2000). *Where on Earth Are We Going?* Toronto: Vintage.