

The coincidence between the date on which the Antarctic Treaty entered into force and the date, twenty years later on which this Consultative Meeting opened in Buenos Aires gave rise to reflections on the evolving system of obligations that had been undertaken by the Consultative Parties.

Prior to the Antarctic Treaty the Antarctic had been more the subject of international competition than co-operation. The International Geophysical Year, 1957-58 had shown the benefits of co-operation and the Treaty sought to establish a firm foundation for the continuation and development of such co-operation on the basis of freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica.

The Antarctic Treaty prohibited activities of a military nature, nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste material; it aimed to promote international scientific co-operation, provided for periodic consultations on matters of common concern and ensured the observance of its provisions by establishing the right of Consultative Parties to inspect activities in all areas of Antarctica.

Before the International Geophysical Year the Antarctic had been generally looked upon as having little effect on the rest of the world. The encouragement provided by the Treaty for cooperation between scientists has enabled them to increase knowledge of Antarctica at a much faster rate than would otherwise have been possible. The importance of Antarctica as, for example, a major global climatic regulator, has become ever more apparent.

The Antarctic Treaty System of continually evolving consultative procedures has produced recommendations covering a wide variety of subjects which benefit from international co-operation. Where these recommendations touch upon scientific matters the Consultative Parties have sought the advice of Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) through their National Antarctic Committees.

Among the system's achievements have been a unique and all embracing set of conservation measures comprising the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora, the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals and the recently concluded Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. In exercising their responsibility for the protection of the Antarctic environment, the Consultative Parties have taken a number of additional steps to prevent harmful human impact upon that environment.

The Antarctic Treaty System of arrangements dealing with the practical requirements for international action is the only widely accepted arrangement which exists in the area. There are now twenty-five contracting states and it was a welcome event that at the Third Special Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting earlier this year the Consultative Parties had acknowledged that the Federal Republic of Germany had fulfilled the requirements for Consultative status under the Antarctic Treaty and thus participated in the Eleventh Consultative Meeting in Buenos Aires.