

Two students bring youths' concerns to Earth Summit

By CHILDREN'S EXPRESS

EDITORS: Lydia Isaac, 14;
Mia Anderson, 16.

REPORTERS: Joyce
Ramirez, 11; Scarlett Arias,
13; Jerry Tann, 10; Megan
Burke, 11; Karisma
Santiago, 11.

The U.S. delegation to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro from June 3 through June 15 includes two youth representatives, Stanford University student Karen Plaut and Michigan State's Michael Dorsey.

Before leaving for the summit, *Children's Express* spoke with these two members of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC) about their views on this historic event.

Karen Plaut: I think we only have a few years left before the whole world's gone too far. I'd like to hope that at this point there's still a chance to turn back.

Seventy to 80 percent of the environmental policies are short-sighted. That's why the youth really have to look to the future. We have a perspective that in 50 years we're going to be around, while

the people who are making the policies right now won't be.

You have to hope that the earth can be a better place.

Children's Express: Who's going to the Earth Summit, and what do you think it'll be like?

Karen: There will be delegates from 160 countries going. The actual summit will be mostly heads of state and high government officials. There will also be thousands of non-governmental organizations who will be holding a parallel conference called the Global Forum.

Michael Dorsey: I expect it's going to be a very chaotic event. There's supposed to be over 30,000 people converging on Rio for the days during the summit.

Karen: I think from the conference itself there's not a lot to be expected because the preparatory meetings have shown that what was supposed to be accomplished — for instance, a real reduction in CFC emissions [the gases that deplete the ozone layer] — isn't going to be accomplished.

But, as youth environmental activists, what is going to be of value is meeting non-govern-

mental organizations who are working on the same issues and meeting youth from around the world who want to organize and address these issues in the future.

Michael: There's a very large clash between the North and the South — the developed and the undeveloped countries. The South is saying that the North has to

Karen: That's the exact problem: we should see ourselves as a whole. This planet is one being, and we're all people living on it. What goes around comes around.

CE: Do you think the U.S. is doing enough for the environment?

Michael: Not in the least. The U.S. has been blocking progress on a lot of agreements, especially

A number of countries in Western Europe and Canada are also pretty bad.

CE: How do you think the environment problems will affect future generations?

Karen: I think it's going to affect us in ways we can't even imagine yet. Problems like the ozone hole and toxic waste. It's going to affect the way we live, like not being able to spend much time outside or have lakes and rivers to swim in. People will end up living behind concrete walls, not able to appreciate nature the way it is or the way it was.

CE: Do you think kids can help?

Michael: Education is the most important thing that has to happen. The grassroots level is really where it's happening, like starting recycling centers or reducing your family's consumption of resources.

Karen: The fact that it's not being done right by adults and more is being put in our hands just shows that it's up to us to do something. Actually, you'll find that children are some of the best environmentalists in really respecting nature for what it is.

"People will end up living behind concrete walls."

address its over-consumption and over-effort into renewing the resources of the South instead of continually exploiting the resources there.

Whereas the North is saying we're not doing anything so bad, the South should replicate what we're doing and use it as a model. It's that kind of fundamental, I guess ideological, difference that's stood in the way of the Earth Charter.

global warming. The U.S. has refused to sign the agreement phasing out CFCs by the year 2000 — the only country that wouldn't sign it.

Basically, all the negotiations have to be decided on consensus, and if the U.S. refuses to have something go through, they can stop it. This has happened in toxic waste issues, in forestry issues, in almost every area where the U.S. is refusing to make any changes.