

Maurice Strong

1929 - 2015

Maurice Frederick Strong began his career as an oil tycoon and ended his days as an environmental activist. He helped found the Canadian International Development Agency and mobilized some of the most important international environmental conferences in history. His multi-faceted life culminated in a lasting legacy.

Born in Oak Lake, Manitoba, in 1929, Maurice grew up during the midst of the Great Depression. He finished high school at the age of 14 and, though he won a cash prize to help with the costs of University, he used this money to pay off his parent's creditors.

Before starting his industrial and financial career, he occupied several contractual jobs all over Canada, including working in a northern trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1944. In 1945, he became an accountant for a mining group in Toronto. Quickly moving up the managerial ladder across multiple companies, he eventually became President of Power Corporation of Canada, a position he held until 1966.

He then was appointed by Prime Minister Pearson to establish what would become the Canadian International Development Agency, a position he kept until 1970. This enabled him to form ties with the United Nations, leading to an invitation by the then UN Secretary-General to lead the upcoming Stockholm Conference on the Environment as its Secretary-General and to become Undersecretary General of the UN responsible for environmental affairs. He used his diplomatic skills to launch the era of international environmental diplomacy, uniting 122 countries on this issue. Subsequently, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was created, and Strong served as its first Executive Director until 1976.

That same year, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau asked Strong to return to Canada to lead the newly established Petro-Canada, then a national oil



company. He subsequently served as Chairman of the International Energy Development Corporation from 1980 to 1983 and of the Canada Development Investment Corporation from 1982 to 1984.

In 1985, he returned to the UN as an Under-Secretary-General, and in 1992 he played a momentous role leading the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Following this major success, he was deeply involved in a number of organizations over the rest of his life, including the Earth Council, the World Resources Institute, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Stockholm Environment Institute, and many more. From 1992 to 1995, he reinvigorated Ontario Hydro by lowering rates and increasing its environmental sustainability.

Maurice held 46 honorary doctorates and was made Companion of the Order of Canada in 1999. He died in November 2015 at the age of 86, right before COP 21 began in Paris.