Press Release

Beijing air improvements provide model for other cities

- Air pollutants lowered by 25-83% (depending on pollutant) since 2013
- Measures include controls on coal-fired boilers, cleaner domestic fuels, and industrial restructuring
- $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations in Beijing still exceed levels recommended by the World Health Organization

Nairobi, March 9, 2019 – More than 20 years after Beijing began looking for ways to improve air quality in one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the developing world, its successful efforts provide a model for other cities to follow, according a report released ahead of the UN Environment Assembly.

Research by UN Environment and the Beijing Municipal Ecology and Environment Bureau (BEE) outlines how Beijing's air quality management programme has evolved, and makes recommendations for near, medium, and long-term steps that Beijing can take to maintain its momentum toward clean air.

The report, *A Review of 20 years' Air Pollution Control in Beijing*, was compiled by a UN Environment-led team of international and Chinese experts over two years. It covers 1998 to the end of 2017.

"This improvement in air quality didn't happen by accident. It was the result of an enormous investment of time, resources and political will," said Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of UN Environment. "Understanding Beijing's air pollution story is crucial for any nation, district or municipality that wishes to follow a similar path."

He Kebin, the principal author of the report and Dean of Tsinghua University's School of Environment, said Beijing progressed between 1998 to 2013, but that there were even more significant improvements under Beijing's *Clean Air Action Plan 2013–2017*.

In 1998, air pollution in Beijing was dominated by coal-combustion and motor vehicles. Major pollutants exceeded national limits. By 2013 levels had fallen

and some pollutants, like carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxides, met national standards.

In 2013 Beijing adopted more systematic and intensive measures. By the end of 2017 fine particulate pollution ($PM_{2.5}$) had fallen by 35 per cent and by 25 per cent in the surrounding Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Much of this reduction came from measures to control coal-fired boilers, provide cleaner domestic fuels, and industrial restructuring.

Over this period, annual emissions of sulfur dioxide (SO_2), nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter (PM_{10}) and volatile organic compounds in Beijing decreased by 83 per cent, 43 per cent, 55 per cent and 42 per cent respectively.

Beijing's air quality management system is supported by monitoring and evaluation, pollution source apportionment and emission inventories. It also contains comprehensive legal standards and strict environmental law enforcement. Air quality work is supported by economic policies, public participation, and coordination on air pollution prevention and control in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Mr. Yu Jianhua, Deputy Head of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Ecology and Environment, said that while much has been achieved, more can be done.

"At present, the PM2.5 concentration in Beijing still fails to meet national ambient air quality standards and far exceeds the levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), and heavy pollution episodes still occur during autumn and winter," he said. "Solving all these air quality issues will be a long-term process. We are willing to share our long-accumulated knowledge and wealth of experience on air pollution with other cities in developing countries."

Mr. Liu Jian, UN Environment's Chief Scientist, said the results reflected the Chinese Government's emphasis on environmental protection and the input and intensity of pollution control in recent years

"Beijing's efforts, achievements, experiences and lessons in air pollution control over the last twenty years are worth analyzing and sharing in order to progress global environmental governance," he said.

This is UN Environment's third independent assessment of Beijing's air quality, following the *Independent Environmental Assessment: Beijing 2008 Olympic Games* and *A Review of Air Pollution Control in Beijing: 1998–2013*, which were published in 2009 and 2016 respectively.

Dechen Tsering, Director of UN Environment's Asia Pacific Regional Office, said UN Environment was committed to promoting sustainable development and best practices in countries and cities around the world.

“Beijing has achieved impressive air quality improvements in a short amount of time.” Ms. Tsering said. “It is a good example of how a large city in a developing country can balance environmental protection and economic growth.”

Download the report in English or Chinese

For more information and to request an embargoed copy of the report, contact:

Tiy Chung, Climate and Clean Air Coalition Communications Officer: tiy.chung@un.org, +33 626 71 79 81(contactable on that number on WhatsApp and WeChat apps)

Zixing Dai, Beijing Municipal Ecology and Environment Bureau officer: tonydzx@aliyun.com; +86 135 0102 6315.