



Press release

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## **Historic UN Environment Assembly Calls for Strengthened Action on Air Quality, Linked to 7 Million Deaths Annually, Among 16 Major Resolutions**

**Nairobi, 27 June 2014 –**

The inaugural UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) concluded its five-day deliberations in Nairobi on Friday with 16 decisions and resolutions that encourage international action on major environmental issues ranging from air pollution and the illegal trade in wildlife, to plastic debris in the oceans, chemicals and waste.

"The air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil that grows our food are part of a delicate ecosystem that is increasingly under pressure," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the closing session late Friday. "We need to act decisively to change humanity's relationship with our planet." "This is just the beginning. Change is in the air. Solutions exist," he added. "We are now poised for the crucial next phase of human development," he said.

The international community participated in the Assembly in record numbers, with high-level delegations from 160 UN Member and Observer States and stakeholders from multiple sectors present.

UNEA sessions were attended by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon; the President of the Republic of Kenya, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta; the President of the UN General Assembly John Ashe as well as chief executives of the UN system; among them the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark and Secretary General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Mukhisa Kituyi.

The sessions were presided over by Mongolia's Minister of Environment and Green Development Dr. Oyun Sanjaasuren.

The High-Level Segment, which began on Thursday, focused among other things, on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including Sustainable Consumption and Production.

"The resolutions agreed by Member States at UNEA will help shape the global environmental agenda into the future and will determine collaborative action on priority issues from marine

plastic debris and micro plastics to the illegal trade in wildlife," said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

"These resolutions, including the one on air quality, provide a clear indication that, in its successful and ambitious first session, UNEA is providing a robust policymaking platform that truly places the environment at the heart of sustainable development," he added.

#### AIR POLLUTION A PRIORITY

Air pollution, responsible for 7 million deaths annually, according to estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO), was identified as a top issue that requires immediate action by the international community.

"Poor air quality is a growing challenge, especially in cities and urban centres, compromising the lives of millions worldwide. Action to reduce air pollution will save lives and provide co-benefits for the climate, ecosystem services, biodiversity and food security," said Mr. Steiner.

The delegates unanimously agreed to encourage governments to set standards and policies across multiple sectors to reduce emissions and manage the negative impacts of air pollution on health, the economy, and overall sustainable development.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was mandated to step up its support to governments through capacity building, the provision of data and assessments and periodic reporting on progress made. The decision on air pollution is expected to strengthen existing work by UNEP in areas related to transport emissions, indoor air pollution, chemicals and sustainable consumption and production through programmes such as the Climate and Clean Air Coalition and the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles.

#### THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN WILDLIFE

UNEA called for reinforced actions and enhanced international coordination to counter the illegal trade in wildlife, which poses threats to the environment and sustainable development. The resolution strongly encourages governments to implement their commitments to fight the illegal trade through, among other things, targeted actions to eradicate supply, transit and demand for illegal wildlife products. It promotes zero-tolerance policies and the development of sustainable and alternative livelihoods for communities adversely affected by the illegal trade.

According to a report by UNEP and INTERPOL titled *The Environmental Crime Crisis*, released during UNEA, global environmental crime is worth up to US \$213 billion each year and is helping to finance criminal, militia and terrorist groups and threatening the security and sustainable development of many nations.

UNEP was requested to undertake a number of activities to further efforts in this area, including: providing an analysis of the environmental impacts of the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products to the next UNEA session and to raise public awareness about the issue and to work closely with the International Consortium to Combat Wildlife Crime, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL, CITES, UNDP and the Secretary General's Rule of Law Group.

UNEP was also requested to support governments to develop and implement environmental rule of law mechanisms at the national level.

UNEA also featured a Ministerial Dialogue on the Illegal Trade in Wildlife, during which participants moved beyond the current attention focused on the poaching crisis facing African elephants and rhinos, to address a wider range of threats from illegal harvesting and trafficking including timber, fish, tigers, pangolins, great apes and a broad range of birds, reptiles, and other plants.

## MARINE PLASTIC DEBRIS AND MICROPLASTICS

A resolution on marine plastic debris and microplastics noted with concern the impacts of such materials on the marine environment, fisheries, tourism and development, calling for strengthened action, in particular by addressing such materials at the source. The resolution called for the strengthening of information exchange mechanisms, requesting UNEP to present scientific assessments on microplastics for consideration by the next session of the Assembly. Governments were urged to collaborate through relevant Regional Seas Conventions and River Commissions with a view to adopting action plans in their regions.

According to new reports launched by UNEP and partners at UNEA, there is growing concern over the threat that widespread plastic waste poses to marine life, with conservative estimates of the overall financial damage of plastics to marine ecosystems standing at US \$13 billion each year.

## INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS AND WASTE

The UN Environment Assembly emphasized the sound management of chemicals and waste as an essential and integral cross-cutting element of sustainable development and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Chemicals are an integral part of everyday life, with over 100,000 different substances in use.

While chemicals are major contributors to national economies, they require sound management throughout their life cycle. Otherwise, in addition to the benefits, they also pose significant risks to human health and the environment and result in significant costs to national economies.

Environmental effects of the unsustainable use of chemicals and hazardous waste range from effects on sensitive species and ecosystems, to large scale issues such as eutrophication of water bodies and stratospheric ozone depletion.

The continued growth pattern of global production, trade and use of chemicals exerts an increasing chemicals management burden on the developing countries and those with economies in transition that have the least capacities to deal with such complex challenges.

UNEA welcomed an integrated approach to address the financing of the sound management of chemicals and waste, underscoring that the three components of an integrated approach—mainstreaming, industry involvement and external finance—are mutually reinforcing and essential.

## THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

UNEA reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to the full implementation of the Rio+20 outcome document, The Future We Want, in particular the section on the environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development and paragraph 88 on strengthening and upgrading UNEP.

It emphasized the historic importance of convening the first universal session of UNEA, as the leading global environmental authority, to address global environmental challenges and provide overarching policy guidance within the UN-system. It recognized the fundamental role of UNEA in promoting the full integration and coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development and its role in advancing solutions for the global environmental agenda.

Fed in part by a Ministerial Plenary on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda including Sustainable Consumption and Production, UNEA also called for the full integration of the environmental dimension into the sustainable development process, acknowledging that a healthy environment is an essential requirement and key enabler for an ambitious, universal and implementable post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Assembly also called on Member States to accelerate and support efforts for the promotion of sustainable production and consumption patterns, including through resource efficiency and sustainable lifestyles.

"UNEA is a historic event for all of us, set to define not only the future of UNEP, but to support further the institutional framework and programmatic platform for sustainable development and set the environmental agenda for the world to follow," said Ms. Sanjaasuren.

Other decisions focus on a wide range of topics related to the environment and sustainable development.

## OTHER RESOLUTIONS

Other resolutions focused on the following issues:

- The need to accelerate and support the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through resource efficiency and more sustainable lifestyles;
- Urgent action to address climate change through the full cooperation of all countries, including through the full implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- Fostering and encouraging the development of partnerships to address environmental challenges faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in particular with relation to priority issues to be adopted at the upcoming Third UN Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa;

- The need to strengthen the science-policy interface as a key means of encouraging more effective policymaking on sustainable development at all levels;
- The need to ensure the full implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other international and regional environmental commitments;
- The need to reinforce efforts to halt biodiversity loss and combat desertification and land degradation.

## SYMPOSIA AND OTHER MULTISTAKEHOLDER EVENTS

A series of specialized symposia and events enhanced the five-day meeting, bringing together a wide range of actors beyond the environment community, including economists, bankers, Chief Justices and legislators, civil society and youth groups.

### Symposium on Environmental Rule of Law

A symposium on "Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development" invited Chief Justices, Attorneys General, Judges, Chief Prosecutors, Auditors General, leading legal scholars, practitioners and experts to discuss the ways in which the further development and implementation of environmental rule of law can help ensure just and sustainable development outcomes.

For more information, read a full story about the event:

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2791&ArticleID=10910&l=en>

### Symposium on Financing the Green Economy

A second symposium on "Financing a Green Economy" was held, during which Ministers of Environment, policymakers and actors from across financial markets discussed the need to re-channel trillions of dollars from today's unsustainable economy into greener growth. Foremost among their discussions were: a regulatory framework for capital markets; financial intermediation between small and micro-sized enterprises and large pools of capital; and creating pools of blended capital to offset risks associated with long-term investments.

For more information, read a full story about the event:

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2791&ArticleID=10925&l=en>

### Youth Gathering, Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, and Gender Forum

Events kicked off in the days prior to UNEA with a number of critical civil society meetings, whose input fed into overall UNEA deliberations. These included a Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum and a Global Youth Gathering of the Tunza Youth Advisory Council, which discussed UNEA's main themes. More than 180 participants from over 30 countries attended the UNEA Gender Forum, which met under the theme "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming sustainable environmental management". The Forum discussed gender and environment within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### About the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

UNEA is the governing body of UNEP and the principal body of the UN in the field of the environment. It enjoys universal membership of all 193 UN member states. A large number of stakeholder groups also attend the sessions. With this wide reach into the legislative, financial and development arena, UNEA presents a universal platform for leadership on global environmental policy. UNEA boasts over 1200 participants, 170 national delegations, 80 ministers and 40 events during the five-day event from 23 to 27 June 2014 at UNEP's HQ in Nairobi, Kenya. [www.unep.org/unea](http://www.unep.org/unea)

[http://www.unep.org/unea/docs/Compilation\\_of\\_decisions\\_and%20resolutions\\_advanced\\_united%20copy.pdf](http://www.unep.org/unea/docs/Compilation_of_decisions_and%20resolutions_advanced_united%20copy.pdf)

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