

THE SECRETARY GENERAL
REMARKS AT LUNCH MARKING 40TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAMME
HOSTED BY H.E MWAI KIBAKI, PRESIDENT OF KENYA
Addis Ababa, 29 January 2012

Your Excellency Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya,
Your Excellency, Yayi Boni, Chairperson of the African Union,
Your Excellency, Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP,
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here to celebrate UNEP's 40th anniversary.

The United Nations Environment Programme came into being 40 years ago in response to growing concerns about acid rain, chemical pollution and the general despoiling of our one and only planet.

Its birth, following the landmark conference on the human environment in Sweden in June 1972, marked a historic and urgently necessary expansion of the work of the United Nations.

It was also significant for another reason.

At that time, UN organizations were exclusively located in the developed world.

But the General Assembly decided to locate UNEP in Nairobi.

The rationale was clear: Member States wanted not only to uphold the principles of a global organization, they wanted this new agency to be close to the people of the frontlines of environmental degradation.

And so it has been. UNEP has contributed across a wide spectrum of human need.

It has promoted science and capacity building.

It has established environmental norms.

It has negotiated and administered key environmental treaties, such as the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. More than 30,000 species are under the CITES umbrella.

UNEP was instrumental in establishing the 1983 Brundtland Commission that published “Our Common Future” and produced the conceptual breakthrough of sustainable development.

The 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer has repeatedly broken new ground.

It has shown the power of multilateral cooperation and how governments and business can work together for the common good.

And the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization, has become the world’s definitive voice, driving negotiations and spurring action on climate change.

Looking to the future, UNEP is a pioneer of the green economy, which will figure front and centre at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June.

There is thus little wonder that calls are growing for UNEP to be given more global influence.

The global population has reached 7 billion people. In just five years, we will add another half billion people, all needing food, jobs, security and opportunity.

Environmental, economic and social indicators tell us that our current model of progress is unsustainable.

Sustainable development offers the best chance to adjust our course.

That is why it is at the top of my priority list.

From Rio+20 and beyond, I will rely on UNEP to continue to provide the cutting edge ideas the world so sorely needs.

I thank President Kibaki and the people of Kenya for hosting this important organization.

May this mutually beneficial relationship endure for decades more.

Thank you.