



Achim Steiner

New Executive Director



Achim Steiner – the Director General of IUCN-The World Conservation Union – has been unanimously elected to be UNEP’s fifth Executive Director by the UN General Assembly. He succeeds Klaus Toepfer, who has stepped down after completing two four-year terms in the post.

Mr Toepfer welcomed Mr Steiner – who was recommended to the General Assembly from a short list of five by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – as “an outstanding individual among a field of outstanding candidates.”

He added: “I am convinced that choosing Achim Steiner will prove to be a great decision, bringing youth, dynamism, intellect, and a deeply held commitment to environment and sustainable development issues. His breadth of experience with intergovernmental negotiations, civil society, scientists, and private business will build on UNEP’s evolving networks with and beyond governments.”

Mr Steiner, who will start his term of office on 15 June 2006, has led the 1,000-strong staff of The World Conservation Union, since 2001. The world’s largest

environment network, it has over a thousand members – including states, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations – in 140 countries.

A German national, born in 1961 in Brazil – where he lived for ten years – he holds a BA from Oxford University and an MA from the University of London, with specialisation in development economics, regional planning, and international and development policy. He also studied at the German Development Institute in Berlin and at the Harvard Business School.

He has since worked both at grassroots level and at the highest levels of international policy-making to address the interface between environmental sustainability, social equity and economic development.

His career has included working with a community-based organization in India; advisory positions on sustainable development with NGOs, public sector and international organizations in Pakistan, Germany, the USA, and Vietnam; and short-term assignments in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the South

Pacific. He managed a regional conservation programme for IUCN in Southern Africa and, as Senior Policy Adviser of its Global Policy Unit, led the development of new partnerships between the environmental community and the World Bank and United Nations system.

He worked as Chief Technical Advisor on a programme for sustainable management of Mekong River watersheds and community-based natural resources management. In 1998 he was appointed Secretary General of the World Commission on Dams, based in South Africa, managing a global programme of work to bring together the public sector, civil society and the private sector in a global policy process on dams and development.

Mr Toepfer, whose tenure as Executive Director of UNEP concluded on 31 March, presided over a period of UNEP’s history that has seen environmental sustainability become front page news and central to international development goals. Among the milestones of his tenure were important environmental agreements, including the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety – which addresses issues of genetically modified organisms – and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. He was also closely involved in behind-the-scenes negotiations in support of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.

His term also saw the establishment of the annual Global Ministerial Environment Forum, tasked by the General Assembly with reviewing important and emerging environmental issues. And it witnessed increasing importance given to the area by the international community: environmental sustainability is enshrined as an explicit objective of Millennium Development Goal 7, and as a thread that runs through all the rest of them.

In welcoming his successor Mr Toepfer emphasised UNEP’s “key role in promoting sustainable development, fighting poverty, realising social justice and achieving stability in the 21st century.” ■