

Message of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

The economic and financial turmoil sweeping the globe is a true wake-up call, sounding an alarm about the need to improve upon old patterns of growth and make a transition to a new era of greener, cleaner development. The theme of this year's World Environment Day – "Your planet needs you" – is meant to inspire all of us to do our part.

The Earth faces the grave threat of climate change. While all countries will suffer, the poor will bear the brunt of the impact. We do, however, also have an opportunity to change course. Crucial climate change talks will take place in Copenhagen in December. Together, we must press governments to "Seal the Deal" for a new climate agreement.

The world also needs a "Green New Deal" focused on investing in renewable sources of energy, eco-friendly infrastructure and energy efficiency. This will not only create jobs and spur recovery but also help tackle global warming. If we invest even part of the substantial new economic stimulus packages in the green economy, we can turn today's crisis into tomorrow's sustainable growth. Moreover, countries that make the transition to a low-carbon society will reap more than significant environmental benefits; they will be well-placed to share their new technology with others.

But our planet needs more than just action by governments and corporations; it needs each of us. Although individual decisions may seem small in the face of global threats and trends, when billions of people join forces in common purpose we can make a tremendous difference.

On this World Environment Day, I encourage all people to take concrete steps toward making the planet greener and cleaner. Switch off the lights. Take public transportation. Recycle. Plant a tree. Clean up your local park. Hold corporations responsible for their environmental practices. And urge your government representatives to Seal the Deal in Copenhagen.