

## Foreword



In the Foreword to the first edition of *Natural Allies*, published in 2004, noted Indian ecologist Dr. Vandana Shiva wrote that: "Engagement between UNEP and civil society is necessary, both for UNEP and for the protection of the planet's fragile web of life. In this engagement lies the potential for resurgence of democracy and ecological awareness. I welcome this new engagement of UNEP with the democratic forces of civil society: it will strengthen both."

Vandana Shiva's central insight that both UNEP and civil society have a lot to gain by working together is as true now as it was five years ago. And there is no time to lose: the planet's ecosystems are under severe stress, and problems such as climate change, atmospheric pollution, land degradation, freshwater scarcity, and the loss of biological diversity on land and sea pose major challenges to all countries and people.

But environmental problems are not only threats; they also present enormous opportunities. We have spent the 20th century discovering how we destroy the environment. We should use the 21st century to learn how we can survive and thrive with the environment at the heart of our economic development aspirations.

Responding effectively to today's pressing environmental challenges will require the full and effective participation of all sectors of society. UNEP has placed particular emphasis in recent years in reaching out to the nine Major Groups, first recognised at the Rio "Earth Summit": Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples and their Communities, Local Authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations, the Scientific and Technological Community, Women, and Workers and their Trade Unions. Our new Medium-Term Strategy takes to heart the challenge of working in partnership with civil society to implement UNEP's Programme of Work in six priority issue areas: Climate Change, Disasters and Conflict, Ecosystem Management, Environmental Governance, Harmful Substances and Hazardous Wastes, and Resource Efficiency and Sustainable Consumption and Production.

*Natural Allies* provides a clear picture of how civil society can and does work with UNEP, both benefiting from and strengthening UNEP's programme of work. The publication is targeted at civil society and should be read from a civil society point of view. Its purpose is to provide answers to your questions about UNEP. I hope the book also provokes in readers a desire to participate in UNEP's work and enables organisations and individuals to gain the maximum benefit from UNEP's commitment to working closely with civil society. My sincere wish is that this book will contribute to assisting civil society catalyse the political and social changes that are needed if we are to accelerate a transition to a resource efficient, low carbon, sustainable Green Economy in the 21st century.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Achim Steiner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Achim Steiner  
UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director

