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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO THE 26TH SESSION OF THE UNEP GOVERNING
COUNCIL/GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
Nairobi, 21 February 2011

I am pleased to greet all delegations to this session of the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum. You meet in the context of preparations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development next year in Rio de Janeiro. The world has changed considerably since the Earth Summit 20 years ago. Despite agreement on Agenda 21 – our blueprint for sustainable development – and treaties covering climate change, biodiversity and desertification, these notable achievements of Rio have failed to prevent the continued deterioration of the environmental services on which we all depend.

It is time to upgrade our responses and institutions. We need a practical, 21st-century development model that connects the dots between poverty reduction, climate change, and food, water and energy security. To that end I have established a High-level Panel on Global Sustainability to make recommendations that can feed into the intergovernmental processes designed to address these matters, including preparations for Rio 2012.

As environment ministers, your engagement will be crucial. But we will not generate the political commitment we need without bringing on board your counterparts in finance, trade and other arms of government.

Sustainable development is not a purely environmental agenda; rather, it depends equally on three pillars: economic, social and environmental. Efforts to build a green economy can help to unite these elements and unlock the door to a more secure and prosperous world. However, green economy principles will be effective only if supported by strengthened international environmental governance that can catalyze cooperation, mobilize resources and prioritize actions that lead to low-carbon, resource-efficient growth.

Changing direction can bring risks. But science and economics both reach the same conclusion: the greatest danger is to do nothing, leaving challenges unattended and opportunities unrealized. Rio 2012 is a powerful opportunity to mobilize the political courage to change course toward a more equitable, sustainable path for all. Your deliberations this week can help to set us on this road. I wish you a productive meeting.