



**REMARKS BY ACHIM STEINER,**  
UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director

At the opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Special Session of the UNEP  
Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

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**1972-2012:**  
Serving People  
and the Planet

Your Excellencies,  
President of the Republic of Kenya Mwai Kibaki,  
Honourable Ministers Responsible for the Environment,  
Leaders of Civil Society, Delegates, Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet here at the Headquarters of UNEP some four months before  
the UN Conference on Sustainable Development or Rio+20.

Rio+20 is a moment to take stock of the past 20 years of  
sustainable development – a moment too, to deliver the means  
of implementation for a very different century in a world  
of seven billion people.

This Special Session is also about taking stock and equally  
about supporting Rio+20 to achieve real, meaningful and  
decisive outcomes that can scale-up and accelerate  
the transformations that have been  
emerging across the globe.

While Rio+20 takes stock of two decades, our meeting this week in a sense takes stock of four decades.

The young people who sang to you this morning from the Swedish School, joined by peers from the International School of Kenya and Kenton College, link to UNEP's history and the search for a sustainable world since Stockholm 1972.

The secretariat and the staff of UNEP 2012 have made extraordinary efforts to capture the past and to remember our collective journey here in Kenya and internationally as part of this 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, year-long celebration.

In and around Gigiri you will see exhibitions of photographs with some of the famous personalities and people who have come to UNEP in search of solutions or to provide their wisdom and insight into the challenges of their time.

Kenneth Kaunda, the first President of Zambia and George Bush senior the then vice president of the United States; Pope John Paul II; the late Wangari Maathai and only last month Gisele Bündchen, the current face of fashion, environmentalist and UNEP Goodwill Ambassador.

I am delighted that three out of four former UNEP Executive Directors are with us too – two men and a woman who had their struggles and their successes running this institution on behalf of you honourable ministers and UN member states.

If you have a moment during your busy schedule, take a stroll among the beautiful gardens here and marvel at the trees, many of which were planted by your predecessors and by presidents, prime ministers and personalities from across the globe.

As part of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have produced a Guide to the Famous Trees of Gigiri to aide and illuminate your journey and focus your reflection.



Meanwhile there are posters and banners — and in addition a special web site — chronicling the milestones and achievements of 40 years of environmental policy-making and law by environment ministers acting through this and related fora.

The establishment of CITES which now assists to conserve and protect 30,000 threatened species; the Montreal Protocol and its phase — out of ozone-damaging chemicals and an idea, quite literally born round the back of these very rooms to establish an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to name just three.

My policy statement later will look back but mainly look forward—but I dwell a little bit here on the history of UNEP for two reasons.

One, because in a busy, challenging and increasingly fast-paced world it is all too easy to forget what has been achieved in 40 years — in part because governments change, memory fades, the threads linking decisions taken in these very rooms with successes on the ground become frayed.

And two: Because as the Spanish philosopher George Santayana said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.

Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, that is a luxury we do not have given what the science tells us is happening to our world.

In celebrating the past let us now look to the future.

In remembering history, let us now look to history-in-the making as we pursue the Road to Rio+20 and the opportunities it may bring for truly realizing sustainable development and fulfilling the vision of Stockholm and Rio four and two decades ago.

Thank you.





# UNEP

[www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)

United Nations Environment Programme

P.O.Box 30552, Nairobi 00100, Kenya

Tel: +254 (0)20 762 1234

Fax: +254 (0)20 762 3927

Email: [unepub@unep.org](mailto:unepub@unep.org)