

Speech by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme.

Public Meeting with the President of Mexico on the Occasion of the Launch of the Book ‘And What About the Environment?’

Felipe Calderon, President of Mexico; distinguished scientist and long standing UNEP friend Mario Molina, Rajendra Pachauri, head of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Juan Elvira, Minister of the Environment of Mexico; Education Minister Josefina Vazquez Mota; members of the Educational Community, Students, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we are to Green national economies and the global economy as a whole we need all sectors of society to pull as one.

That includes our educational establishments and the young people of this world.

We know that the young understand and ‘feel’ the risks of environmental degradation perhaps more keenly than their parents and adult leaders.

They also have very clear and direct policies for resolving these challenges, unfettered by the concerns that perhaps dog and colour decision-making in ministries and board rooms of the world.

So I would like to congratulate President Calderon and his government and members of the educational community for conceiving and realizing this excellent guide and tool for teachers—“And What About the Environment? Problems in Mexico and the World”.

UNEP has a long standing relationship with children and young people under its Tunza programme.

Tunza comes from the Swahili language of Kenya—where UNEP is globally headquartered—and means to Treat with Care and Affection.

I will certainly take this important new teaching guide back to our regional office in Panama and to headquarters and see how it can be linked to UNEP’s Tunza programme across the globe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

So what about the environment?

Well, we know the science and the statistics. We know that on many fronts—fisheries and soils to biodiversity and the atmosphere—we are pushing if not pushing past the limits.

However, we also know that we are seeing another phenomenon.

This is a growing and nascent Greening of the Global Economy driven in part by our collective concerns but also the huge opportunities presented by climate change.

Businesses, cities, communities and countries across the globe are rapidly understanding that for environmental, for social, for economic and for security reasons a transition to a low—perhaps even zero-emission economy-- makes sense now and for the future.

In two days time, during the General Assembly meeting in New York, UNEP along with the International Labour Organization; trades union and employer's groups, will present our Green Jobs report.

One fact—there are now more people employed in environmental technologies than in the entire oil and gas industry.

We are at a crossroads: we have a new Green Economy emerging and starting to compete with the old, Brown economy of the past.

Now we must urgently accelerate and federate this transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,
this is why I am delighted to be here in Mexico.

Under the personal stewardship of President Calderon your country is one of several now showing real leadership on climate change.

- Leadership internationally through new and bridge-building proposals in the UN climate convention negotiations.
- Negotiations that must lead to a new and decisive climate regime by the crucial climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in late 2009.
- One of those creative proposals includes Mexico's Green Fund—one of several promising ideas from countries which offers the chance of complimenting existing mechanisms like the Clean Development Mechanism and funding via the Global Environment Facility.

Leadership too on domestic action through an ambitious and forward-looking climate change strategy.

Leadership also in the carbon markets.

- UNEP's Risoe Energy Centre estimates that Mexico is now second in the region in terms of the number of registered and planned Clean Development Mechanism projects.
- UNEP is delighted to be partnering Mexico on a UNDP-GEF funded project to boost the solar water heater market here.
- By 2020 the aim is to have close to 25 million cubic metre of solar thermal installed, perhaps generating as many as 150,000 new Green Jobs in the Mexican economy.

(UNEP is also pressing to federate a transition to a low carbon economy via our Climate Neutral Network—I would encourage Mexico's cities and companies to also see if they can take a leadership role here joining cities and corporations from China and Canada to New Zealand and Sweden.)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mexico is also showing leadership on the wider sustainability challenges.

- Environmental sustainability as one of the five pillars of your development plan.
 - Payment for Ecosystem services—I understand that some 1.5 million rural people in some of the poorest areas of Mexico are now involved in this creative economic solution to sustainably utilizing natural assets from forests to freshwaters.
 - Leadership as well on biodiversity management and protected areas.
 - From 2000 to 2008, Mexico's National System of Natural Protected Areas has increased its budget by 700% (from 13 million dollars in 2000, to 90 million dollars in 2008) and its total protected area by 67% (from 15 million hectares in 2000 to 23 million hectares today).

I am glad that UNEP and also UNEP and the Global Environment Facility has been a partner in this growing success story and that Mexico has recognized our growing expertise in this area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are at the crossroads of the Brown and the Green Economy.

We need to mobilize grass roots and global public support for that transition which in turn can empower leaders around the world.

Last year World Environment Day was hosted by New Zealand under the theme “Kick the CO2 Habit”.

That was Asia Pacific’s turn. This year the host is in Latin America.

President UNEP knows that Mexico has become rather skilled at mobilizing grassroots support for environmental challenges.

Mexico pledged and planted 250 million trees under UNEP’s Billion Tree Campaign and I am told that 280 million more may be planted soon under the new Seven Billion Tree Campaign.

So for this reason—and for many of the reasons outline above--UNEP is delighted to confirm that Mexico has been chosen to be the international host of the global World Environment Day celebrations on 5 June 2009.

The general theme will be under the United Nations slogan UNite to Combat Climate Change”.

The specific banner will be “Your Planet Needs You”

We are sure that WED 2009 will be –

- A show case for how a developing economy at the crossroads of regional and global challenges is stepping up to the bar to demonstrate sustainability solutions.
- A rallying point for the global public in order to focus attention on poverty, forests and climate change only some 200 days before nations gather in Copenhagen.

Ladies and gentlemen,

“Your planet needs you”—not tomorrow, not as some countries have suggested in 2050, but your planet needs you today.

President Calderon, I believe from what I heard and what I have seen here in Mexico that you are a country echoing to that challenge; imperative and urgency.

We look forward to deepening our relationship with your country over the coming weeks and months as we prepare for that very special day on 5 June next year.

Look forward to taking ahead and accelerating that regional and global transition to the Green Economy.

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