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Environmental hazard at Finnish mine site

On 4 November, a major leakage was detected in the gypsum waste pond of the polymetallic and uranium mine site of Talvivaara Mining Company Plc. in Sotkamo, Finland. Finland’s Environment Minister visited the site, calling it “a serious environmental crime”. Finland’s largest newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, published an editorial that labelled the company “a large-scale failure, that casts a shadow on the efficiency of the Finnish society as a whole”, criticizing Finnish officials for not taking action against the mining company for its environmental problems.

On 14 November, the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE announced that it had analysed the latest samples of waters around Talvivaara. The analyses confirm the alarming situation south of the mine area. The levels of heavy metals are poisonous to organisms, and the high level of aluminium may cause fish kills in a wide area.

The Chair of the Finnish Parliament’s Environment Committee said the mine should be prevented from resuming operation. Possible gaps in regulations regarding safety at the mine in eastern Finland are being examined, and an investigation has been launched by the Ministry of the Environment.

Talvivaara has announced it has been given the all clear to recommence its metal recovery plant. According to Talvivaara, as of 21 November, operations at the facility have successfully returned to the stable utilization rates achieved before the leakage, however, the company’s uranium production will be delayed until the necessary environmental permit is received, possibly in May 2013.

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The Netherlands and Nordic countries renew support to UNEP

Annual consultations with the Netherlands were held in Nairobi on 19-20 November, followed by consultations with Nordic countries.

The discussions were open and constructive. The Netherlands reiterated their support to UNEP, in terms of both funding and substantive policy orientations. As major contributors to the Environment Fund, the Netherlands would like UNEP to reflect on how best to ensure visibility to “core contributors” including such as the Netherlands. Representatives encouraged UNEP to continue efforts towards results-based management, and more accountability and transparency. They also stressed the need for UNEP to enlarge its donor basis with new and emerging economies as well as through increased partnership with the private sector. The Nordic countries were particularly interested in UNEP’s work on Green Economy and the integration of all work streams related to it into an overall strategy, in light of the post-2015 agenda. They expressed clear support to universal membership to UNEP, and called for better coordination within UNEP and the UN system. They would like UNEP to prioritize work on planet boundaries, highlighted the need to continue efforts towards gender balance, and also called on UNEP to enlarge its donor base. Furthermore, the Nordic countries wish to see more transparency in the budget process and prioritization.

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I. GOOD TO KNOW

Highlights of the Third Meeting of the Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB)

On 16 November, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan hosted the third meeting of the EHMB. The meeting brought together the eight representatives from health and environment sectors and included UNEP, WHO and UNECE.

The WHO Secretariat presented on the conceptual framework for environment and health in Europe addressing the major 21st century challenges and policy developments. Also covered: the proposal for priorities for the European Environment and Health Process (EHP); the implementation of Parma Conference commitments including multilateral environmental agreements as tools for implementation of these commitments; the EHMB’s report to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy in 2013; and the proposed communication plan for the European Environment and Health Process.

Among the many decisions and agreements: the need to strengthen cooperation and collaboration with the European Commission; the move to invite the European EH Youth coalition to attend EHMB meetings as observer; and support for the inclusion of Environment and Health as an agenda item in the next Regional Committee in 2013. The “European EH Gateway” is to be developed in consultation with EHMB members from other UN organizations as well as a plan to engage the EHMB with International Financial Institutions. It was also agreed to fully account for the available resources that can support action, such as the InforMEA which is linked to the development of the inventory of policy instruments, in particular MEAs as Tools for Implementation of Parma commitments. The board also agreed with the proposed structure of the communication strategy and called for the engagement of youth in the implementation of the strategy, for example, through the World Health Youth (WHY) environment and health communications network of young journalists.

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New Deputy Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions

Ms Kerstin Stendahl has been appointed Deputy Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (UNEP).

Ms Stendahl joins the secretariat after her post as Director for International Environmental Governance at the Ministry of the Environment, Finland.

Throughout a distinguished career, Ms Stendahl has worked in the field of the environment with particular focus on policy issues related to chemicals and wastes management and biodiversity. She brings broad, high-level diplomatic experience and an intimate knowledge of the workings of the three conventions, having served on the bureaus of the Rotterdam and Basel conventions, and having chaired the synergies process among the three conventions and the budget groups at all three 2011 conferences of the parties. She has served at the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) secretariat, and has represented Finland in key roles at UNEP’s Governing Council and in the Rio+20 process.

Ms Stendahl assumed her new position on 9 November 2012.

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CITES welcomes Secretary Clinton’s Call for Action on illegal wildlife trade

“...over the past few years wildlife trafficking has become more organized, more lucrative, more widespread, and more dangerous than ever before... it is also a national security issue, a public health issue, and an economic security issue.” said Secretary Clinton at the event hosted by the US Department of State.

The ‘Call for Action’ includes four elements: increased diplomatic efforts, a global outreach campaign, strengthened and expanded enforcement areas, and a concerted global response. This call comes almost 40 years after the US Department of State hosted the ‘World Wildlife Conference’, which culminated in the adoption of CITES, a convention that for the first time brought international trade in wildlife under control.

Speaking at the event as an invited expert, John E. Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General, said: “The brave men and women who serve on the front-lines to protect wildlife are no match for the heavily armed and organized criminal groups and rebel militias involved in wildlife trafficking today. These groups do not hesitate in using violence, in corrupting local officials, or in killing rangers - and they are depriving local people of legitimate development choices. Combating these serious crimes requires the support … of a wide-range of ministries and will sometimes require the direct intervention of the highest level of government.”

Fighting wildlife crime will be high on the agenda of the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in Bangkok, Thailand from 3-14 March 2013.

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Stanley Johnson’s 40 Years of Environmental Action

On 13 November, UNEP supported the Club of Rome in hosting a talk given by Stanley Johnson. Mr Johnson is a well-known British conservationist, Ambassador to the UN Convention on Migratory Species and founder of the Parliamentary group GLOBE (Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment). He shared his broad view based on forty years of environmental action and policies, drawing lessons for the future of our planet. Mr Johnson stressed that despite the slow progress of climate change negotiations today, there’s a glimpse of hope in UNEP’s Green Economy report.

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Shale gas discussion back on EU agenda

The European Parliament (EP) voted on 21 November on two reports from the committees working on Industry, Research and Energy and Environment and Public Health. These reports outline the EP’s position on the impacts of shale gas development in Europe on its environment, industry, energy choices and population’s health. The industry is preparing for battle to make sure that these reports prepared by the industry itself, which it sees as relatively balanced so far, are not amended to its disadvantage. That concern motivated a coalition of seven companies, most of them multinationals in the oil and gas sector: Total Gas Shale Europe (a Total subsidiary), Shell, Statoil, Chevron, Cuadrilla Resources (Britain), Vermilion (Canada), and Halliburton. By the end of 2013, The European Commission is expected to present a new communication on shale gas that could take the form of a revision of certain directives, in particular the impact assessment directive.

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UNEP launches online group tailored for EU

UNEP launched a new “UNEP – Environment for Development” group on the capacity4dev.eu platform, where EU-relevant updates, all key UNEP documents, and highlight of upcoming and past UNEP events will be posted. Please register on http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/unep/ to get event alerts and check for new publications.

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Arctic Council: future activities

On behalf of UNEP, the Regional Office for Europe attended the Third Meeting of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) of the Arctic Council under the Swedish Chairmanship on 14-15 November. Thematic areas covered at the meeting by the various working groups and expert groups on Climate, Environment, Biodiversity and Oceans are closely related to UNEP’s Medium Term Strategy. All member States of the Arctic Council were present (Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Canada, USA, Russian Federation, Finland, and Denmark) as well as Permanent Participants, observer States and observer organizations. Arrangements for the new permanent Arctic Council Secretariat in Tromso, Norway were discussed and the newly recruited Director of the Secretariat, Magnus Johannesson (Iceland), was introduced. The meeting provided an update ahead of the Arctic Ministerial Meeting being organized by the Swedish Chairmanship in Kiruna, Sweden in May 2013. The update included several activities: the Arctic Resilience Report, Short-Lived Climate Forcers, the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, Adaptation Actions for a Changing Arctic, the Arctic Ocean Acidification Report, Ecosystem Based Management expert group, the Arctic Spatial Data Infrastructure project, the Sustaining Arctic Observing Network (SAON), the drafting of an international instrument on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response, the Arctic Ocean Review, the Corporate Social Responsibility workshop, and the planned Meeting of Ministers for Environment of the Arctic Council countries on 6 February 2013.

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International Youth Forum

The international Youth Forum entitled “What did youth get out of Rio+20?” brought together 185 participants to discuss the outcome of the Rio+20 conference with presentations, interventions and discussions on environmental sustainability. The forum was opened by H.E. Prof. Hussein Baghirov, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, who challenged young people to build on the momentum created by the Rio conference to create the future they want. Participants expressed appreciation for UNEP’s multi-faceted role, encouraging, in particular, national Tunza strategies and platforms to engage and empower youth in matters related to greening of economies, creation of sustainable livelihoods and green jobs. A big topic was also the UN System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) on youth and ongoing efforts to address the needs of the world’s ever-growing generation of young people.

Launch of Green Economy Scoping Study

From Fossil Fuels to a Sustainable Future: A Roadmap to a Green Economy for Azerbaijan

This new study calls for Azerbaijan to increase its energy efficiency and renewable energy capacity, and to step up efforts to facilitate the transition away from fossil fuels. Developed by UNEP and Azerbaijani experts, it was the basis of a Green Economy Roundtable.

The agriculture sector, employing around 38 per cent of the population and 48 per cent of the rural population, could benefit from enhanced public-private partnerships with agri-business and stricter regulations regarding agricultural inputs and outputs. Also according to the study, green transportation can present employment opportunities and enhanced economic activity while linking rural communities and helping to reduce poverty. The study recommends that the government enhance promote investment in clean vehicle technology.

“The scoping study lays the foundation for our future work on a green economy. We will gather the thoughts and views expressed today at the roundtable to prepare a policy note to the Government,” said Farhad Mamedov, Head of the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

More information here
Regional Consultation and Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS)

Topics at the UNEP European Regional Consultation Meeting (RCM) included the outcome and contribution of MGS to GMGSF-13 and GCSS.XII/GMEF; overview of issues from the Outcome Document for MGS and implications for UNEP; MGS perspective on Rio+20 Outcome; and Principle 10 application and prospects from the Rio+20 Outcome. Breakout groups discussed and developed a regional statement based on topics such as potential mechanisms for engagement and participation of civil society in a reformed UNEP, involvement of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, and Mainstreaming Sound and Safe Chemicals Management.

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Participants reflect:

“I feel that the conference showed me youth participation is crucial in educating the next generation as it really is us who will be helping to shape the world in the years to come.”

“Being in Baku I learnt so many thing from my friends and partners who participated in the event. To say the least the event was so resourceful to me, from interacting with academia, civil societies and other partners represented.”

“I liked the involvement, integration and sharing of the information which is power and I would request for any involvement in your activities in future.”

“Interaction with local youth and youth from other parts of the world was fulfilling and an eye opener concerning different creative initiatives that young people are doing to not only conserve the environment but also as a means of livelihoods for them and their communities.”

A week of learning: The UN’s Role, Environmental Diplomacy

UNEP was requested to give an open lecture at the Azerbaijan Academy of Public Administration to 200 students of public administration on the leadership and implementation role of the United Nations in international development issues. The lecture focused on the Secretary-General’s five-year Action Agenda, a plan “to build the future we want” with priorities that include accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals and a specific plan for promoting the full participation of women in social and economic recovery and for youth development targeting employment, entrepreneurship, citizenship and protection of rights, and education.

A half day event featured a lecture on environmental diplomacy at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA). The lecture was modelled on the course that UNEP offers to diplomats, policy and decision-makers, the private sector, NGOs, trade unions and UN bodies, teaching skills in global negotiations in environment, sustainable development and related fields.

Tackling Climate Change in EECCA countries

Sustainable energy finance and development, sustainable transport, and new technology for mitigation of climate change and environmental impacts were discussed at the workshop “Territorial Approach to Climate Change (TACC) - Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” attended by around 40 high level participants from Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

TACC is a joint partnership by UNDP, UNEP, UNITAR and UN-Habitat to increase knowledge for climate change issues sub-nationally and ensuring that climate change policies are developed and integrated in national plans. The workshop was also an opportunity to introduce the “Covenant of Mayors (COMO) Going East” Initiative funded by the European Commission, which involves local and regional authorities who have voluntarily committed to increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in their territories.
Strengthening national Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning associations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Participants from national refrigeration and air-conditioning associations (RAC) were offered training on all aspects of RAC management on 27-29 November, in Casale Monferrato, Italy. Given by the Italian Centro Studi Galileo, the European Association of Refrigeration, Air-conditioning and Heat Pump Contractors (AREA) and UNEP, the sessions also included assessment and certification of RAC experts from Armenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kyrgyzstan and Macedonia FYR under the F-gas regulation.

Based on discussions during the meeting, a factsheet on creating and managing such associations will be prepared and shared with countries in other regions.

Since 2009, representatives of national RAC associations have participated in the meetings of the Regional Ozone Network for Europe and Central Asia (ECA network) and played a crucial role in implementing the national HCFC phase-out management plan. The meeting focused on those countries with relatively young RAC associations and those which are planning to establish such associations in the near future. So far, the ECA network has supported the creation of national RAC associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Macedonia FYR.

All participants successfully passed the assessment and were certified under the F-gas regulation. This certification is mandatory in the European Union member states and will shortly become mandatory in accession countries like Croatia.

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Moldova and Ukraine sign treaty on sustainable management of Dniester River Basin

On 29 November, the Minister of Environment of the Republic of Moldova, Mr Gheorghe Salaru, and the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, Mr Eduard Stavytskyi, signed the bilateral Treaty on Cooperation for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Dniester River Basin. The Dniester River is one of the largest Eastern European rivers. It starts in the Carpathian mountains in Ukraine, flows through the Republic of Moldova and then re-enters Ukraine where it discharges into the Black Sea. In addition to supplying drinking water for a large part of the basin, including the major Ukrainian city of Odessa, hydropower generation and fisheries are other important sectors the river serves.

The new treaty identifies principles and provides a framework for cooperation on water pollution prevention and control, water flow regulation, conservation of biodiversity and protection of the Black Sea environment. It also addresses the monitoring of data exchange, public participation and cooperation in emergency situations.

The enhanced cooperation of the two countries has been supported by the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) through a series of Dniester projects managed by UNEP, UNECE and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Project expeditions reveal severe water quality problems, declining biodiversity and deteriorating ecosystems along the river. The impacts of climate change, such as increasingly frequent and devastating floods are already felt in the basin. The signing of the Treaty as a basis for improved transboundary cooperation between the two countries is a timely response to these challenges.

**UNEP study:**
Livestock trade is key to economic recovery in Darfur

The revival of the trade of livestock in Darfur – mainly camels, cattle and sheep – is key to the long-term economic recovery of this region in Sudan. Livestock is Darfur's principal export, and in 2011 was Sudan’s most important export after petroleum and gold. However the livestock trade in this region has plummeted by 40% to 50% since 2003 due to the ongoing conflict, according to a recent report by UNEP, Tufts University and the Feinstein International Center.

The report, entitled “On The Hoof” and funded by the UK Department for International Development (UKaid) as part of their support to UNEP’s project in Sudan, analyses the livestock trade in Darfur since 2003 in light of the conflict.

Looting of livestock has been widespread, and many livestock traders have gone out of business. In addition, large-scale traders have left Darfur’s livestock markets due to insecurity and the risks associated with trekking animals. Escalating costs and soaring taxation rates also prompted a dramatic decrease in the livestock trade.

Still, some positive signals have been detected, including agreements between traders of otherwise hostile groups that could be a starting point for rebuilding relationships around natural resources.

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**Environmental and security priorities for Central Asia**

The annual regional meeting of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) in Central Asia took place on 8 November in Alma Aty, Kazakhstan. The meeting's purpose was to provide an update on ENVSEC's current work programme in Central Asia and facilitate discussions of post-2012 priorities and opportunities in the region.

Preliminarily areas as prioritized by ENVSEC for 2013 include socially and economically responsible mining and uranium waste legacy management, dialogue with Afghanistan on transboundary water management, climate change adaptation with a focus on climate security and risk management, and improved access by civil society to environmental information and justice. UNEP, one of the six ENVSEC partners, has experience in the field of mining, especially in mine closure, management and planning, for example, it assisted the Western Balkans in assessing risk, mapping, designing low-cost intervention, and providing capacity building to stakeholders. UNEP’s participatory approach to the issue can be deployed in Central Asia and create possibilities for exchange of experience and knowledge transfer to other regions.

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**Year of the Bat 2012 - Networking for bats across Europe and the World**

Under the lead of the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Year of the Bat (YoB) campaign reached out to a global audience. A joint campaign by CMS and EUROBATS has been encouraging governments, civil society and interested individuals to participate and engage in educational awareness and conservation work.

The campaign included publications highlighting links between bats and biodiversity, and practical advice such as how to build boxes to give bats a home and, in return, have fewer mosquitoes and other insects. Museums, universities, conservation groups, schools and individuals initiated a range of activities, hoping to reverse the negative public perception of bats by emphasizing their role in providing ecosystem services.

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UNEP report highlights value of indicators for transitioning to green economy

On 3 December, UNEP launched a new report that shows how indicators can measure progress towards a resource-efficient, green economy as well as inform policy decisions that support sustainable societies.

“This publication is intended to help policy-makers understand how useful such measurements are for informing policy decisions and advancing their green economy agendas at a national level,” said UNEP’s Executive Director, Achim Steiner referring to the report, ‘Measuring Progress towards an Inclusive Green Economy’.

According to the report, indicators can be used at all stages of policy interventions: identifying the key environmental issues; assessing the potential cost and performance of various policy options to understand which investment will yield the highest return in environmental, social and economic terms; and tracking the impact of the policies on human well-being and equity.

UNEP representatives pointed out that currently, most countries concentrate too heavily on gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of economic performance; since GDP monitors macroeconomic activity, the idea is to supplement GDP with other measures that better reflect the multidimensional nature of human well-being and quality of life.

More information here

SEE BIOREGIO Carpathians project – First Stakeholders Meeting

On 8-9 November, the first stakeholders meeting to help implement the main provisions of the Carpathian Convention Biodiversity Protocol took place in the Duna Ipoly National Park, Hungary. The meeting was part of the EU co-funded South East Europe (SEE) BIOREGIO Carpathians project and organized by UNEP Vienna – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, together with WWF Danube – Carpathian Project Office (DCPO) and the local Protected Area (PA) Administration. Several stakeholders from the Carpathian Region represented sectors of biodiversity, protected areas management, forestry, tourism, and water management, discussing regional development opportunities and common measures for an integrated management of the Carpathian PAs. The outcomes will be included in related studies developed within the BIOREGIO Carpathians project, together with additional analysis and the results of the next stakeholders meetings in February 2013.

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UNEP discusses data and indicators

An internal UNEP meeting on data and indicators was organised at UNEP’s Environment House on Monday 3 December. The purposes of the first-ever internal, cross-divisional meeting on this subject were to: 1) take stock of ‘who is doing what’ within the organization in terms of data and indicators; 2) examine what mandates UNEP has in this realm and who we are serving with data and indicators; and 3) look for synergies between the different parts of the organization that are working on data and indicators. The discussions were particularly timely in light of UNEP’s increasing involvement in post-Rio+20 processes concerning, e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and data and indicators to monitor progress towards achieving these. Representatives from at least five divisions and a wide variety of departments and units took part in the meeting, with a total of more than 20 individuals from Bahrain, Geneva, Montreal, Nairobi, Panama, Paris and Washington participating. Among the major decisions taken, it was agreed to prepare a ‘white paper’ on the status of data and indicators in the organisation, and how ongoing and future work can be made to strategically serve the goals of UNEP and the post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda. A first draft of such a document will be prepared in early 2013.

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On 18-19 December, the UNEP-China Annual Consultations 2012 will be held in Geneva. The outcomes of Rio+20 will be discussed and UNEP will be updated on China’s environmental policy. The consultations will focus on the review of UNEP-China cooperation and discussion of priorities and plans for 2013.

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13 December, UN House, Brussels:

Intern-only roundtable with Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard on ‘Post-Doha: the role of young professionals in climate change talks’.

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While governments work to negotiate a new international climate agreement to come into effect in 2020 they urgently need to put their foot firmly on the action pedal by fulfilling financial, technology transfer and other commitments under the UN climate convention treaties. There are also a wide range of complementary voluntary measures that can bridge the gap between ambition and reality now rather than later.

said UNEP’s Executive Director, Achim Steiner, speaking on the findings of the Emissions Gap Report, coordinated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the European Climate Foundation, released ahead of the Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Doha in November.