

Message from Minister of the Environment, Ms. Helen Bjørnøy, Norway



The Norwegian Government is honoured to host the international World Environment Day 2007 celebrations in recognition of the hot topic of melting ice.

Ice plays a critical role in shaping our planet's environment. Ice reflects a share of the sun's heat back into space, cooling the planet. Ice holds large parts of the world's freshwater supplies, and is a vital part of the ecosystems that sustain both human life and wildlife.

Earth's ice cover is changing dramatically. Shrinking ice cover is a clear sign of global warming. Global ice melting accelerated during the 1990s, which was also the warmest decade on record. Ice is melting at sea, on land, and in the ground, with shrinking mountain glaciers and thawing permafrost. Ice melting is not limited to the polar areas, where it is melting at a dramatic pace. Ice is melting in all regions.

It is our hope that the World Environment Day will focus on all the ways in which climate change – and melting ice – affects people's lives all over the world, whether this be in the form of sea level rise, land erosion, drought, floods, storms or other threats to livelihoods and lifestyles. We need to remind ourselves that a healthy and stable environment and a rich natural resource base are essential for human welfare, development and security. We need to join forces to communicate that this is something worth defending and fighting for, as an international community and as individuals. This much we owe to ourselves and to future generations.

As a polar nation, Norway is highly aware of the Arctic's vulnerability and its important role in the global climate system. In addition, the fragile Arctic is the final dumping ground for the persistent toxic chemicals that threaten human health and nature everywhere, making toxic chemicals another global priority issue. The Polar Regions are also of global importance as breeding grounds for fish stocks and migratory species.

There is an urgent need to take action. We must change the warming trend within the next couple of decades. If we don't, we will likely see changes that make Earth a different planet than the one we know. Further global warming of 1°C defines a critical threshold. To keep within this threshold, global greenhouse gas emissions must be halved by the middle of this century. To meet global environmental challenges we need commitment not only at the political - but also at the corporate and grassroots - levels. We don't need one response; we need many responses. Norway is therefore glad to join forces with the United Nations Environment Programme in making the World Environment Day an occasion for broad mobilisation and action for life on earth, all over the world.