



POLICY STATEMENT

BY ACHIM STEINER

UN UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL AND UNEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AT THE OPENING OF THE FIRST UNIVERSAL SESSION
OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL OF UNEP
NAIROBI, 18 FEBRUARY 2013



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KEY RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2012

In 2012, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has confirmed its role as a convener, facilitator and provider of scientific assessments and analyses to catalyze international policy responses and action. It is also a service provider for major programmes at the national and regional levels. The growing confidence in UNEP's capacity to deliver quality services is reflected in the number of mandates awarded to UNEP by Member States and intergovernmental bodies in 2012.

- Within 10 months of its launch, the ***Climate and Clean Air Coalition***, a global partnership to address short-lived climate pollutants, registered 49 members, secured pledges of USD 16.5 million and designated UNEP to provide the Secretariat.
- The Rio+20 Conference agreed to strengthen and upgrade UNEP and establish ***universal membership*** for its Governing Council, successfully concluding the process led by the Governing Council on international environmental governance (IEG).
- The landmark UNEP Green Economy Report featured prominently in the Rio+20 Prep Com process, and ***green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication*** is formally recognized in the outcome document.
- UNEP completed a 2-year process for the preparation of the ***Fifth Global Environment Outlook*** (GEO-5) and released the report in advance of Rio+20; it generated record numbers in terms of media coverage and downloads of the report, and is cited in the Rio+20 outcome document.
- The ***10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production*** was adopted at Rio+20, and UNEP was chosen to provide the Secretariat for the 10 YFP process.
- Following the release of UNEP's landmark report on ***oil pollution in the Niger Delta***, Nigeria announced a national programme for remediation (HYPREP).
- UNEP was requested by the Government of the Russian Federation to be the Programme Coordination Agency for a GEF-funded ***programme for the Russian Arctic***. This USD 336 million programme involves a consortium of national and international executing agencies including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank and UNDP.
- The Doha Climate COP selected the UNEP-led consortium of 14 partners to provide the ***Climate Technology Centre Network*** mandated by the UNFCCC.
- The Governing Council decision of 2009 mandating UNEP to facilitate the negotiation of a ***new legally-binding treaty for mercury*** culminated in agreement of the text by more than 140 countries at the Fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC5) held in Geneva in January 2013.
- ***IPBES*** was formally established in 2012 following three years of UNEP-facilitated negotiations; the first session of IPBES, held in January 2013, successfully elected its first chair, established the Bureau and Expert Panel and designated UNEP to provide the IPBES secretariat, and agreed on the next steps required to operationalize the Platform's work programme.
- ***The World Congress on Justice, Governance, and Law for Environmental Sustainability*** held at Rio calls upon UNEP to lead the establishment of an international institutional network for Chief Justices, Attorneys-General and Auditors General. The Advisory Council was established in December 2012.



Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thinking about the future of UNEP also relates to the future of your Ministries and the environmental portfolio in your countries.

We have come a long way since the environmental agenda was frequently characterized as ‘the preoccupation of the few at expense of the many’ or “the luxury of the rich at the expense of the poor”. Rio+20 recognized unequivocally that

the growing volatility of our economies and markets is increasingly linked to environmental change and the depletion of our natural resources. That poverty is not only a product of history and inequity within and among nations but also ‘man-made’ and exacerbated by the development choices we make — which all too often impact on the livelihoods of the poor by diminishing their resource base and the natural capital on which they depend.

However, this at times costly and painful journey of learning also has significant implications for the “environmental agenda” of the future. Environmental policy, which is not rooted in and cognizant of the political economy of our societies and thus the economic policy and development discourse of our respective nations, will be at risk of being marginalized and ignored.

We cannot continue to “save the planet”, one species, one ecosystem, one policy, one issue, one law, one treaty at a time. Our challenge at the beginning of the 21st century has become a systemic one. Environment Ministers have a mandate to protect the environment but increasingly their success in doing so will be predicated on their capacity to offer environmental solutions which create jobs, expand access to energy, address food security, reduce poverty and enhance livelihoods.

Transition strategies towards a low carbon economy or more sustainable agriculture or fisheries sectors must speak to the complexity of economic policy choices, perceived trade-offs between short-term and long-term objectives and social equity considerations — both intra — and inter-generational. The challenge of achieving not just incremental progress but transformative changes that can deliver absolute reductions in CO₂, a halt to the loss of biodiversity, or a reversal of land degradation and the loss of arable land represents an unprecedented challenge – both to environment ministries and societies in general.

The magnitude of the challenge you face — as Ministers responsible for the Environment — and by extension UNEP and the global environmental agenda is daunting. It is for this reason that we must continuously review, rethink, and refocus the environmental agenda and narrative to reflect the realities we confront today, building on UNEP’s mandate and capacities.

THE FUTURE WE WANT: IMPLICATIONS OF RIO+20 FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At Rio+20, Heads of State and Governments agreed on a far-reaching and complex set of decisions, which provide new impetus to the environmental dimensions of sustainable development, to UNEP, its governance and programme of work (*see also page 9*).

Building on four decades of an evolving discourse on environmental sustainability, the summit has delivered several key directional shifts in the environmental agenda.

The Future We Want:

- places the environmental dimension on par with the economic and social, and recognizes their inherent integrated nature;
- calls for the formulation of sustainable development goals for focused and coherent action, integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015;
- recognizes the role of the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication for achieving sustainable development;
- calls for the strengthening of international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development, including the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP; as well as the establishment of the High Level Political Forum and
- acknowledges that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

THE STRENGTHENING AND UPGRADING OF UNEP

Paragraph 88 of the outcome document of Rio+20 identified several avenues for strengthening and upgrading UNEP, notably:

- the establishment of universal membership in the Governing Council;
- having secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the UN and voluntary contributions to fulfil its mandate;
- enhancing the voice of UNEP and its ability to fulfil its coordination mandate within the UN system;

- promoting a strong science-policy interface;
- disseminating and sharing evidence-based environmental information and raising public awareness on critical and emerging environmental issues;
- providing capacity-building to countries and supporting and facilitating access to technology;
- progressively consolidating headquarters functions in Nairobi and strengthening regional presence to assist countries in the implementation of national environmental policies; and
- ensuring the active participation of all relevant stakeholders.

Rio+20 has conferred a new level of authority upon you as the Governing Body of UNEP and given new impetus for environmental action. At the first session of the UNEP Governing Body under universal membership, we have been tasked with addressing some key questions.

How can a strengthened UNEP respond to the call for solutions, partnerships and new approaches? The decisions you take this week will define the strategic directions for how you wish UNEP to function in the future, what you wish it to focus on, how you choose to govern it, and how to use it to set a global agenda that enables collective international action while delivering effective support to your national efforts.

OUTCOMES AT RIO+20 OF SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR UNEP

In addition to the call for the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP contained in paragraph 88 of the outcome document, Governments at Rio made a number of key requests to UNEP, including to:

- *provide the secretariat for the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production;*
- *conduct a regular review of the state of the Earth's changing environment and its impact on human well-being;*
- *enhance coordination and cooperation among MEAs, including the Rio Conventions;*
- *support enhanced coordination and cooperation among chemical and waste conventions and with the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management;*
- *support an early start of work of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;*

- *support implementation of green economy policies with toolboxes, best practices, methodologies and platforms;*
- *further support the private sector on corporate sustainability reporting;*
- *promote decent work, including green jobs initiatives and related skills;*
- *support the development of sustainable transport systems;*
- *support action to reduce the incidence and impacts of pollution on marine ecosystems, including through the effective implementation of relevant conventions; and*
- *support cooperative action among States on sustainable mountain development.*

KEY ISSUES RELATED TO DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

General Assembly resolution 67/213 explicitly requests you to decide on the future arrangements for the Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum. This raises the question of how best to make use of your presence, Ministers of Environment, and that of your officials, at future sessions – including for strengthening the role of UNEP as the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda and provides corresponding implementation support through the secretariat.

It also raises the question of how to continue the high-level dialogue among you as the Ministers responsible for the environment as well as with the actors of the global environmental community that we have developed over the years. A number of options and ideas have been suggested by various delegations which are now before you for consideration.

The governance process and structure of the UNEP governing body will need to be reviewed with the transition to universal membership, including issues related to the Bureau and its size and composition, the need for specialized committees, the role of the CPR and details on

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