

# OurPlanet

United Nations Environment Programme

June 2014



## The First United Nations Environment Assembly



**Ban Ki-moon**  
UNEA – reconciling  
the needs of  
people and planet

**Michelle Bachelet**  
Time for change  
is here

**Angela Merkel**  
The future we want –  
and decisions we need

**Michael Bloomberg**  
Making headway



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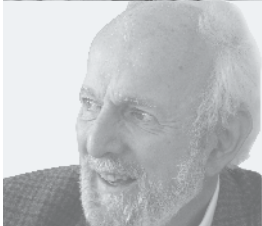
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# Achim Steiner: Reflections



**Achim Steiner**

*UN Under-  
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Director*

**T**his inaugural meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is a truly historic event. It is the culmination of more than four decades of ground-breaking work by UNEP to tackle and provide responses to the environmental challenges of our age and places these firmly at the centre of the broader journey towards sustainable development.

UNEP has indeed come a long way since the times when the environmental agenda was frequently characterized as the “preoccupation of the few at the expense of the many” or “the luxury of the rich at the expense of the poor”. In June 2012, at Rio+20 – held exactly 20 years after the transformative Rio Earth Summit – world leaders provided for UNEP’s strengthening and upgrading and it is in this context that UNEA has been designed to take us further along that road, to a world where seven billion people can live with dignity and in harmony with our planet. Mandated to

determine policy and catalyse international action, UNEA represents the world’s policy forum and the new global environmental authority.

At this first UNEA, fittingly meeting in Nairobi, the home of UNEP, ministers responsible for the environment, benefitting from contributions from civil society and other stakeholders, will start providing the design and architecture for the next chapter of the environment programme of the United Nations and inputs to important global policy challenges. This will happen in a new configuration, with *all* member states of the United Nations being represented in the Assembly – the most significant change to UNEP and international environmental governance in the UN since its creation at the Stockholm conference of 1972.

But UNEA is about much more than an enlarged governing council. This new body





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bestows a new level of legitimacy and authority on the decisions that will be taken, which in turn can translate into a more effective service that UNEP and the UN family can provide to the international community and to ministers responsible for the environment.

At its first session, UNEA is expected to provide leadership on global environmental policy and to continue to keep the world environment under review, a mandate first conferred upon UNEP's Governing Council by the 1972 United Nations General Assembly resolution 2997 and subsequently enhanced through Rio+20's outcome, *The Future We Want*.

One of the main themes of UNEA's first session will be "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including sustainable consumption and production". Ministers will also have the opportunity to address the illegal trade in

wildlife, a complex, multi-faceted issue that is generating increasing global attention given its alarming scale and its global inter-linkages and implications.

UNEA will additionally provide a forum for examining crucial processes in environmental action such as the science-policy interface and the strengthened engagement of major groups and other key stakeholders as well as a dedicated gender forum.

A set of unprecedented symposia will also be organized on this historic occasion to broaden the scope for key actors in the sustainable development arena to participate in UNEA. A symposium on the Environmental Rule of Law will bring together lawmakers and decision makers, along with key civil society organizations in lively debates on recent developments linked to international environmental governance.

The second symposium will focus on the questions of how the global finance system can contribute to the green economy and what makes the green economy work for the financial systems. It will bring together professionals of the finance sector, policy makers and environmental economists with the expectation to identify opportunities and bottlenecks for green, sustainable investments.

For the UN system, the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP embodies the notion that challenges are best addressed and opportunities realized when the community of nations and citizens of the world join forces to promote economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental sustainability in a holistic manner. ▲

# Ban Ki-moon: UNEA – reconciling the needs of people and planet

*UNEA shows how far we have come:  
all governments have a role in  
environmental stewardship.*



**Ban Ki-moon**

*Secretary-General  
of the United Nations*

**W**e have come a long way since the UN General Assembly established UNEP in the wake of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. Four decades of growing awareness backed by science have eroded the once widespread belief that environmental

coming-of-age for UNEP and its governing body. For the first time, all 193 United Nations member states are represented along with major stakeholders. The message is clear: protecting humanity's life support system is a duty for all, for the benefit of all.

With its augmented role as a subsidiary of the UN General Assembly, UNEA has the mandate and capacity to position the environment within the sustainable development debate alongside peace and security, poverty reduction, global health, trade and sustainable economic growth as an issue of crucial importance to every government. As of this year, UNEP is better placed than ever to help governments and other key actors incorporate the environment into the mainstream of all policymaking.

The timing could not be better. Next year marks the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals; it is when we will launch a post-2015 sustainable development agenda; and it is when member states have pledged to sign a mean-

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