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MELTING ICE - A HOT TOPIC?



© Nick Cobbing / Still Pictures

ask...



a polar bear



a farmer



an islander



an insurer



an indigenous person

yourself!



WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY • 5 June 2007

UNEP Governing Structure

The UNEP Governing Council was established in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1975 (Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation). The Governing Council reports to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council. Its 58 members are elected by the General Assembly for four-year terms, taking into account the principle of equitable regional representation. Full information on the composition, functions and responsibilities of the UNEP Governing Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, formally established and strengthened as a subsidiary organ to the Governing Council by decision 19/32 of 4 April 1997, is available at www.unep.org/governingbodies.

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Somalia *

South Africa **

Sweden *

Thailand **

Turkey *

Tuvalu *

Uganda **

United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland *

United Republic of Tanzania *

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Uruguay **

* Members whose terms expire on 31 December 2007.

** Members whose terms expire on 31 December 2009.

A Year of Change, a Year of Reform

by Achim Steiner

The UNEP annual report for 2006 is as much my predecessor's as it is mine, both literally and intellectually. Klaus Toepfer, who retired at the end of March 2006 after eight years in charge of UNEP, helped to stabilize the organization and expand its operations, for example in the development of a first-class post-conflict assessment branch, which was again called into action following the recent conflict in the Lebanon and is increasingly being requested by governments in Africa. Above all, Klaus succeeded better than anyone during his two terms of office in articulating the link between environment and development. It is upon this legacy that the organization is evolving, both in its traditional areas and into new and challenging arenas.

For my first term in office, I have set out four broad themes where I want to see UNEP develop greater capacity, take intellectual leadership and, above all, generate targeted action. These are: environment and economics as they relate to ecosystem services; reform of the organization within the wider landscape of UN reform; partnerships with civil society and the private sector; and, last but not least, more effective and efficient management. As I write, almost all the new directors of UNEP's divisions have been appointed following a major recruitment drive. Furthermore, a series of task forces have been reporting on areas ranging from information technology to the more efficient and effective running of the Executive Office.

It is now well over six months since I took over as Executive Director, and I have to say it has been a whirlwind time full of new challenges, possibilities and surprises. Surprises because, despite having considerable familiarity with UNEP before arriving here, I have been astounded by the sheer scope of activities being undertaken across so many fields—at headquarters, in the regions and with our partnerships. This wealth of activity is reflected in this 2006 annual report.



UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner

I also mentioned challenges, because fully integrating this welter of activities so that they pull together in a seamless and fruitful direction is one area that needs urgent attention. Challenges also as a result of the Secretary-General's reform agenda, which requests that UNEP and the rest of the UN system work ever more closely and effectively together in common cause towards sustainable development. These challenges present real possibilities and opportunities, perhaps not seen for a generation. The environment, from being on the margins of political debate, has now moved ever closer to the centre, with governments, business, the scientific community and civil society looking to the UN and to UNEP for guidance and, more importantly, solutions, as never before.

It is a fascinating time to be taking up the post of UNEP Executive Director. There is a revitalized interest in the environment as a source for long-lasting development—if it is sensibly managed—as well as a growing understanding of its potential as a source of conflict if it is not. This is in no

small part due to the widespread realization that we are all living on borrowed time, with many of the planet's ecosystems and nature-based goods and services in decline.

The environmental community of scientists, civil society and concerned citizens had, until very recently, been widely portrayed as the purveyor of alarmist statements and predictions. This is changing. Past warnings of over-exploitation of finite natural resources and the unsustainable use of national, regional and global goods and services provided by natural systems are now seen to be true across a wide range of issues—from biodiversity loss, water scarcity and collapsing fisheries up to the overarching concern about climate change.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), the work of around 1,300 scientists from 95 countries in which UNEP played an important part, not only confirmed longstanding concerns, it went further. Its first report, published in March 2005 in advance of the World Summit held later that year, concluded that approximately 60 percent of ecosystem services are being currently degraded or used unsustainably.

The MA was also seminal in that it advanced straightforward recommendations on how to reverse the decline alongside some compelling economic arguments—arguments that I see as pivotal to UNEP's work over the coming years. For instance, it says that an intact wetland in Canada is worth \$6,000 a hectare, versus \$2,000 a hectare for one cleared for intensive agriculture. Intact tropical mangroves, coastal ecosystems that are natural pollution filters and coastal defenses, as well as nurseries for fish, are worth around \$1,000 a hectare. Cleared for shrimp farms, the value falls to around \$200 a hectare.

The second Africa Environment Outlook, published in 2006, echoes the MA's themes. It builds a case that the region—popularly perceived as poor—is in fact rich in natural and nature-based resources, if only they could be more sustainably developed. Take the wetlands of the Zambezi Basin. It is estimated that the economic value of these wetlands in terms of crops and agriculture is close to \$50 million a year; fishing: nearly \$80 million a year; maintaining grasslands for livestock production: more than \$70 million; wetland-dependent ecotourism: \$800,000

annually; natural products and medicines: over \$2.5 million a year; and so on. It is this deepening awareness of the costs of environmental degradation, allied to the growing recognition that nature-based resources have large and increasingly quantifiable economic value that is now shaping UNEP's strategy as the global environmental authority.

In many ways nature is the wealth of the poor. One element of UNEP's reform agenda is the Poverty and Environment Initiative with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which we are taking forward into 2007. The basis of this relationship was a joint report, released at the 2005 World Summit, which explicitly makes the economic case for the environment in poverty eradication. It says, for example, that every dollar invested in fighting land degradation and desertification may conservatively generate more than three dollars in economic benefits, helping to fight poverty among the billions of people living on fragile lands. Meanwhile, every dollar spent on delivering clean water and sanitation is likely to give impressive rates of return of up to \$14.

Economics is also increasingly a feature of the climate change debate. The UK Government's Stern Report, released in advance of the UN climate change meeting at the UN offices in Nairobi in November 2006, stated that, if no action is taken, average temperatures may rise by up to 5 degrees centigrade from pre-industrial levels, with a commensurate minimum loss of 5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product annually.

In contrast, the costs of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the worst impacts can be limited to around 1 per cent of global GDP each year. The Stern Report also estimates that reducing emissions would actually make the world better off—one estimate indicates that, over time, a shift to a low-carbon global economy would trigger benefits of \$2.5 trillion a year.

Regrettably, whatever measures are taken to tackle climate change, some level of impact is now inevitable, which is why we must also focus on adaptation as an immediate priority—particularly in developing countries. At the Nairobi climate change meeting, UNEP and UNDP, again in the spirit of reform, launched a joint initiative to boost developing countries' participation in the Kyoto

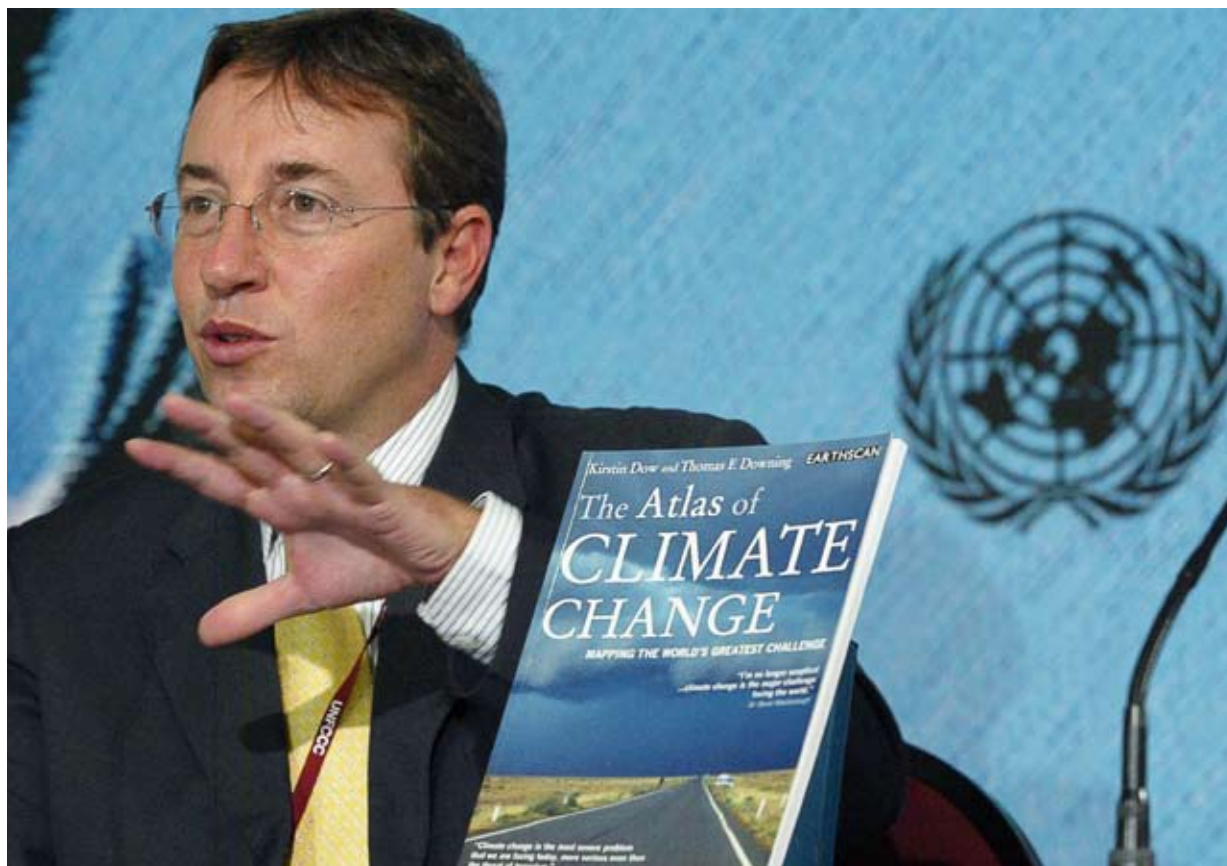
Protocol's clean development mechanism and help developing countries adapt their agriculture and health care infrastructure in a climatically altered world.

2006 was also a year in which it became evident that addressing the world's major environmental and sustainable development challenges is no longer broadly divided down the lines of developed and developing countries. We now have the phenomenon of rapidly developing countries, such as Brazil, China and India. UNEP must be relevant to this constituency within the context of a globalized world of more than six billion people whose aspirations for reasonable lifestyles for themselves and their families require reforms in the way we all consume and produce. The rapidly developing

economies, whose ecological footprints now extend beyond their national borders, are also requested to show international leadership in this new century.

While this annual report looks back over the past year it also points to the future—one in which decisive and wide-ranging decisions need to be made, not least on the overarching issue of climate change and the need to mainstream environment into poverty reduction and development strategies in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals. UNEP looks forward to playing a significant role, strengthened in the certain knowledge that its mandate reflects the calling of our time with environmental issues more pressing and solutions more self-evidently needed than at any time in history.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner at the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Nairobi, 7 November 2006, at the launch of the UNFCCC publication, 'The Atlas of Climate Change: Mapping the World's Greatest Challenge' compiled by the Stockholm Environment Institute with assistance from UNEP. UNEP's work on climate change ranges from assessment, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which it administers jointly with the World Meteorological Organization, and a wide range of capacity building activities. UNEP works closely with the UNFCCC on outreach, and helps developing countries to participate fully in the Convention. UNEP is also assisting countries to benefit fully from the various mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol, such as the Clean Development Mechanism. © Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images



CLIMATE OF CHANGE

UNEP entered a period of transition in 2006. It said farewell to Klaus Toepfer, who had led the organization for eight years, and welcomed Achim Steiner as the new UNEP Executive Director in June. Mr. Toepfer described his successor as “an outstanding individual among a field of outstanding candidates,” and said he was “delighted that Achim Steiner has accepted this important international post at an organization that has a key role in delivering sustainable development, fighting poverty, realizing social justice and achieving stability in the 21st century.”

Mr. Steiner, who had previously served as Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) from 2001 to 2006, took up office with a call to UN member states to put the environment at the heart of economic policies, noting that recent reports, including the UNEP-supported Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, were increasingly emphasizing the “enormous wealth” of ecosystem services. “They also underline that far too many are becoming limited as a result of abuse, poor management and over-exploitation,” he added. Mr. Steiner said one of the main challenges for his first term as UNEP Executive Director is to work to end this “antagonism between economic and environmental policy”. He said he would be focusing on how markets, economic incentives, and international treaties and agreements can be made to work in a way which is “pro-environment, pro-poor and thus pro-sustainable development”.

DELIVERING AS ONE

Mr. Steiner also said that among his many targets for making UNEP even more relevant to the challenges of the 21st century was achieving stronger and more streamlined ties with other UN organizations, civil society and the private sector. “The challenges are so immense that only by working together in mutual self interest can we realize internationally agreed goals and deliver a stable, just and healthy planet for this and future generations,” he said.



Working together, especially at the country level, was the overriding recommendation of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment. The panel’s report, entitled ‘Delivering as One’, presented in November 2006, as well as the UN General Assembly’s ongoing informal consultations on the institutional framework for the UN system’s environmental activities, represent, in Mr. Steiner’s words, “real opportunities that we must all seize.”

The Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel was instituted in February 2006 in response to the outcome of the 2005 World Summit,



Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP between February 1998 and March 2006, speaking at the Zayed Prize award ceremony, held as part of the ninth Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 7–9 February 2006. The Governing Council session, which saw the largest-ever gathering of environment ministers, was Mr. Toepfer's last. He was succeeded in June 2006 by Achim Steiner, who had previously held the position of Director General of the World Conservation Organization (IUCN). 2006 also marked the final year of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's decade of service at the helm of the United Nations. During his two terms of office, Mr. Annan consistently highlighted the importance of environmental sustainability to the UN's broader development goals, something that UNEP has both echoed and taken a leading role in articulating. © UNEP

where members of the UN General Assembly emphasized the central role of environmental sustainability in achieving UN objectives, including global security and the Millennium Development Goals. The Summit outcome also highlighted “the need for more efficient environmental activities in the United Nations system, with enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance... and better

integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework at the operational level, including through capacity-building.”

Working more closely with UN system partners to build capacity at country level lies at the core of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building, which was adopted by



the UNEP Governing Council in 2005 to help developing countries and countries with economies in transition to improve their economies and the living standards of their people, while at the same time preserving the natural capital on which their development is based. The goal of the Bali Plan is more coherent, coordinated and effective delivery of environmental capacity building and technical support at all levels in response to well-defined country priorities and needs. It complements and enhances UNEP's traditional activity areas, such as assessment, environmental policy and law, institution building, and creating partnerships for sustainable development. Specifying how a project contributes to implementation of the Bali Plan will become a routine requirement for project approval, including the identification of related activities conducted by other partners in the countries targeted for UNEP assistance.

One of UNEP's increasingly important partners in implementing the Bali Plan is the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Working together, UNEP and UNDP plan to mainstream environment into the whole development framework, especially in relation to the development of poverty reduction strategies, and to use UNDP's extensive reach to implement environmental capacity building and technological support at country level across the globe. The partnership provides a significant opportunity for UNEP and UNDP to demonstrate that UN reform is indeed happening, and could be the prime example of how the UN can work.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Just prior to the February 2006 Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF), which was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Heads of State of six African countries attending

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