

Remarks by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Opening of the 27th Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

Nairobi, 18 February 2013--His Excellency Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, H.E. Mr. Federico Ramos de Armas, President of the Governing Council, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Hasnaa, President of the Mohammed VI Foundation, Morocco, Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNON Director-General

Honourable Ministers, Members of civil society including youth, representatives of the scientific and business communities as well as United Nations agencies, institutions and multilateral environmental agreements, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Today and for the next four days the city of Nairobi can in many ways be said to be the 'Environment Capital of the World'.

The decisions by Heads of State and governments at Rio+20, including universal membership of UNEP, marks a new departure for nations everywhere including our host country Kenya in respect to international environmental cooperation.

Today and for the first time we are welcoming many new faces who are participating in the Governing Council for the first time along with many familiar ones.

In that respect we are collectively making a small but I believe significant piece of history in support of the Future We Want.

But this Governing Council cannot just be about celebration—ministers responsible for the environment have been given a clear mandate to strengthen and upgrade this institution so that nations can better meet the challenges but also seize the opportunities for a sustainable century.

This week you are ministers of the environment but you are more than that—you are also architects, designers and craftsmen and women.

February 2013 is the date for defining, devising and delivering a 21st century UNEP as per the Rio+20 decisions and their adoption in December 2012 at the UN General Assembly.

In finding the optimal formula for a strengthened and upgraded UNEP, we also need to reflect and agree on an enhanced engagement of the Major Groups and Stakeholders whose own pre-GC meeting ended yesterday.

We need the creativity and vision of many sectors of society including civil society, scientists and business if UNEP is to achieve its full potential for transformational change.

That includes the network of women ministers and leaders responsible for the environment who also met yesterday along with the High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law that has brought forward into a direct dialogue with policy-makers another outcome of Rio+20.

Namely the role of law and of judges, auditor-generals and related disciplines in evolving our understanding of environmental justice and how UNEP can support accelerating a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

And last but not least from the 11th of February to the 14th we hosted several hundred young people—some of whom are still with us this week—under the banner of the UNEP Tunza Youth conference.

Debates and discourse are taking place around the world on the post 2015 development agenda and last week it was a key part of the Tunza meeting.

In their outcome statement to this Governing Council they are calling for food waste and food loss to be one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) given the at least one third loss and waste of food around the globe, the ethical dimension of this alongside the environmental and economic impacts.

And the ability to unite farmers and consumers, supermarkets and suppliers North and South in support of the new UNEP and Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN's new campaign Think-Eat-Save: Reduce Your Foodprint.

Food for thought indeed Excellency, honourable ministers.

If this week's GC can match the energy, determination and clarity which the youth of the world bring to the environmental agenda, I know we will have a productive and exciting week.

Last year we celebrated UNEP's 40th birthday with a half marathon and a fun run with some of the big names in Kenyan athletics prior to the GC.

Next Sunday, following the GC, we are doing the same in partnership with the Paul Tergat Foundation -- so I hope as many as you who can will register via the unep.org web site and come along.

It is an opportunity to celebrate the strong, clear and credible outcomes of this week's meeting; mark the up and running of universal membership after 40 years of UNEP having been established with its world headquarters in Nairobi and to show solidarity with the people of Kenya in support of their elections taking place next month under the newly promulgated constitution.

Your Excellency, as this will be the last Governing Council of UNEP that you will attend in your capacity as President of the Republic of Kenya let me also thank you personally for your unwavering support to UNEP and your steadfast commitment to the environment, and indeed to the United Nations in Kenya and globally. We shall miss you but already extend an invitation for you to attend future Governing Councils as a friend of the UNEP family.

Thank you.