



International Day
of Clean Air
for blue skies

The fifth International Day of Clean Air for blue skies

September 7, 2024

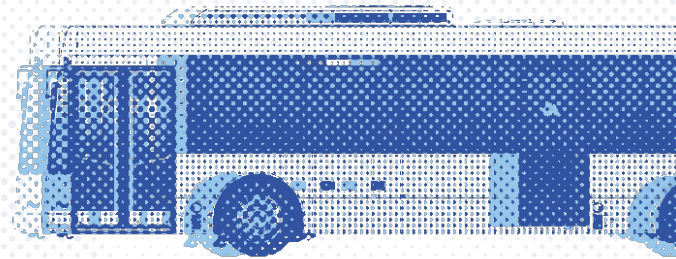


The fifth International Day of Clean Air for blue skies was observed on 7 September 2024, under the theme “Invest in #CleanAirNow”. This annual observance was established following a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution in 2019, which recognized the urgent need to raise awareness of air pollution’s widespread impact on health, the environment, and the economy.

Since its inception, the Day has served as a global platform to emphasize the need for stronger commitments and actions to address the growing air pollution crisis. Each year, it brings together governments, organizations, and individuals to reflect on progress, strengthen partnerships, and mobilize efforts to achieve cleaner air.

This year’s observance highlighted the urgent need for increased investment. Unfortunately, clean air efforts remain chronically underfunded, receiving only 1% of international development finance, despite the significant benefits that cleaner air can provide. Air pollution continues to cause immense harm to human health, ecosystems, and economies, with vulnerable populations suffering the most.

The good news: we can end the air pollution crisis. There are so many ways we benefit when our air is clean. We enjoy a better quality of life. Our children are healthier. Our economies are more productive. And we help to stave off climate change. The clock is ticking, the time to commit and invest is now.



Invest in #CleanAirNow

“Invest in **#CleanAirNow**” is the theme of the fifth International Day of Clean Air for blue skies (**#WorldCleanAirDay**) observed on 7 September 2024. This year’s theme underscores the economic, environmental and health benefits of investing in clean air.

The cost of inaction is staggering. Air pollution is projected to cost the global economy USD 2.6 trillion annually by 2060 due to increased healthcare costs, reduced labour productivity and premature deaths.

Statistics help us grasp the magnitude of the issue: **99 % of people worldwide** breathe polluted air; air pollution was responsible for **8.1 million deaths in 2021**, with over **90% associated with noncommunicable diseases**; and **more than 700,000 children under five deaths** were from causes related to household and outdoor air pollution.

But if we act now, we can halve global crop losses from air pollutants by 2050. Reducing emissions of methane, an important greenhouse gas and air pollutant, could save between **USD 4 billion to USD 33 billion**.



Despite the significant harm air pollution causes, and the benefits that addressing it would harness, clean air efforts are chronically underfunded.

By tackling air pollution proactively, we can achieve transformative change and secure healthy air for all.



Secretary General's message for 2024

“Investing in clean air saves lives, combats climate change, strengthens economies, builds fairer societies, and advances the Sustainable Development Goals.

On International Day of Clean Air for blue skies, let's invest now so we can breathe easy knowing we are securing a healthier planet for all.”

Antonio Guterres

Secretary General of the
United Nations



UNEP Executive Director message for 2024

“On International Day of Clean Air for blue skies, the UN is calling on the world to “Invest in #CleanAirNow”.

We are asking nations, regions and cities to establish robust air quality standards. Back renewable energy and sustainable transport. Hold industry to account with strict emission standards. Integrate air quality into climate action.

We are asking for strong funding: through redirecting fossil fuel subsidies, through grants or microloans for cleaner cooking technologies, and through serious private sector engagement and investment.”

Inger Anderson

Executive Director of UNEP
Under Secretary General



A Web of Information

The website was enhanced with fresh content and up-to-date information, aligning with this year's theme. This includes details on [events](#), [communication resources](#), sections on clean air and its [links to the SDGs](#), a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section, as well as [featured updates](#) from partners, media, and stakeholders globally.

Additionally, the [Air Pollution Action Note](#) has been revised by the [Climate and Clean Air Coalition](#) (CCAC) and [UNEP](#), incorporating updated data on air quality and health impacts.

BUILDING THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

The Day sparked widespread interest, with strong participation and engagement from around the world. Highlights from the campaign month of September are:



Over **35,000 page views**, marking a **10% increase** compared to the previous year. The most visited sections were “[Causes of Air Pollution](#)” and the “[Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)” pages, indicating a strong interest in understanding the issue.

The most engaged audience group was between the **ages of 18 and 24**, reflecting a notable rise in youth engagement and their concern for air quality.

The top two most downloaded resources from the website were the [Practical Guide](#) and the [Brand Guide](#). Both were also distributed as files and shared through the campaign's [Trello board](#) for broader accessibility.

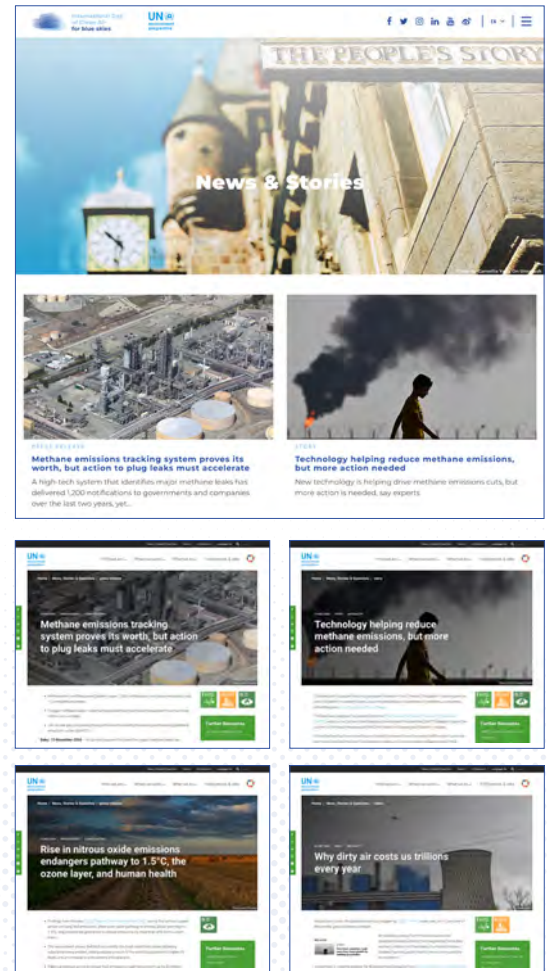
Telling the story

Numerous [articles and stories](#) were produced in the build up to and on the Day to spotlight the issue of air pollution, especially focusing on its theme, bringing it to the forefront of attention.

A total of **9 stories** were published on the Day's official website, covering key issues like the deadly impact of cooking smoke, air quality management in Asia and Africa, and innovations such as low-cost sensors and vehicle emissions testing. Spanning multiple regions, these stories highlight global efforts to improve air quality and protect public health.

A total of 18 associated events were observed by UNEP and UN entities, and an additional **147 events** were organised by governments, cities, finance institutions, businesses, NGOs, academia, and the civil society.

All content was produced in multiple languages, including English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Kiswahili, and Portuguese.





JOINING FORCES TO INVEST IN #CLEANAIRNOW

On Clean Air Day 2024, people from various backgrounds across the world came together for the global observance, including governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, and individuals alike. As part of the observance, a variety of interactive and educational materials were launched, including:

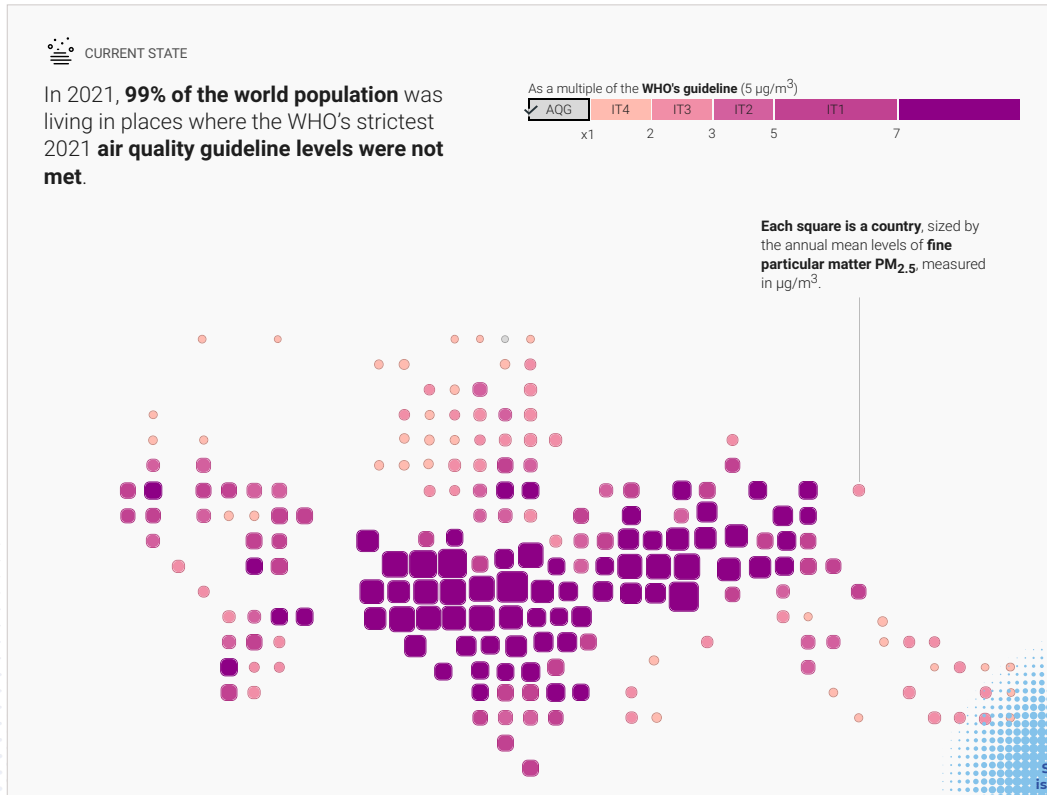
- A **video explainer** titled [Why Dirty Air Costs Us Trillions](#), shedding light on the economic impacts of air pollution.
- A **Public Service Announcement (PSA)** video shot across three continents, urging individuals, businesses, and governments to invest in clean air now and take urgent action against air pollution's global impacts.
- A powerful **video speech from UNEP's Executive Director**, calling for immediate global action to tackle air pollution.
- The interactive "[Meet the Super Pollutants](#)", explaining how they are wreaking havoc on human health by negatively affecting air quality and exacerbating the climate crisis.
- A curated **Spotify playlist for Clean Air Day**, amplifying the call for change with tunes that inspire action and remind us of the importance of clean air.

THE STATE OF GLOBAL AIR: THE POLLUTION ACTION NOTE

The [Pollution Action Note](#), which was first launched in 2021, is further updated to include the most current data. Since then, the Pollution Action Note has been referenced at the world's leading environmental agencies and new media outlets and is one of the most popular web pages among UNEP website.

DATA YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Air pollution caused **8.1 million** premature deaths in 2021, including **709,000** among children under the age of five.
- Nearly the entire global population (**99%**) breathes air that fails to meet safety standards, leading to widespread illness, deepening social inequalities, and stalling economic progress.
- The **second-leading risk factor for early death globally** is air pollution, surpassing tobacco.
- Air pollution **costs** the global economy **USD 8.1 trillion annually** (6.1% of global GDP).
- **Reducing** super pollutants could slow global warming by **up to 0.5°C by 2050**.
- Limiting methane emissions could prevent **255,000 premature deaths**, save **73 billion hours of labour annually**, and avoid **26 million tonnes of crop losses**.
- A **20% reduction in PM2.5** could lead to a **16% increase in employment growth** and **33% increase in productivity**.
- **Less than 1%** of global funds go towards clean air projects.
- **95% of the world's population** lives in a country that is party to an international agreement specifically targeting air pollution.



See how air pollution is impacting individual countries today and the actions they are taking to achieve clean air.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

This year's campaign and [communication materials](#) reached 2.6M users globally, with 47,5K actively engaging with content across all channels. Videos played a key role, attracting a total of 271K views. The most engaging content varied by platform: on [Instagram](#), the "[Roles in Fighting Air Pollution](#)" carousel performed best, reaching 1.1 million users and generating 4,100 engagements. On X (formerly Twitter), ED Inger Andersen's [speech video](#) garnered 14,500 views, while "[Roles in Fighting Air Pollution](#)" carousel reached 44,300 users. Facebook's standout was the "[Hidden Cost of Ignoring Air Pollution](#)" carousel as well, which drove 1,060 engagements and reached 9,100 users, and on LinkedIn, the same content achieved 3,8K engagements and reached 340K.

UNEP partnered with Beijing Airport to showcase an 80-panel exhibition (40 in English, 40 in Chinese) highlighting the health, environmental, and economic impacts of air pollution, engaging travellers with key clean air messages.

The campaign saw a 753% increase in organic reach compared to 2023, indicating stronger reliance on authentic, unpaid engagement. "Organic reach" refers to the number of people who see content naturally—without the use of paid promotions—through direct shares, interactions, and the platform's algorithm, underscoring the growing interest from audiences.



INFLUENTIAL VOICES LEND THEIR SUPPORT:

Several influential figures and organizations joined the community of action to amplify **#WorldCleanAirDay** messages —each lending their substantial reach to the urgent need for **#CleanAirNow**.

Support from across the UN and international institutions system was strong, with key accounts such as the UN [main account](#), [WHO](#), [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#), [World Bank](#), as well as contributions from the [UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation \(UN-REDD\)](#) [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(UN DESA\)](#), [UN Economic Commission for Europe \(UNECE\)](#), and many more.

Prominent voices, such as [UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres](#) and the [Director of the UN University Institute for Water, Environment & Health](#) (who also published an [article in Forbes](#)), stressed the urgent need to tackle air pollution and emphasized the importance of investing in clean air.

Beyond the UN system, the call for **#CleanAirNow** resonated widely. [C40 Cities](#), [ClientEarth](#), [EU Environment](#), the [World Resources Institute \(WRI\)](#), [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#), [Clean Air Fund](#), and [Moms](#)



[Clean Air Force](#) - all leveraged their platforms to advocate for immediate action. Relevant stakeholders like [NASA Earth's](#), [Dr. Lucky Tran's](#) (director of science communication at Columbia) [Greenpeace](#), and the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#) further amplified the message.

Several government and state accounts joined the conversation, including [Canada's Chief of Public Health](#), [Finland's Ministry of Environment](#), the [Republic of Korea Ministry of Environment](#), and the [US Department of State](#). Each highlighted the importance of clean air through targeted messages to their audiences.

High-profile supporters, including UNEP's Goodwill Ambassador [Dia Mirza](#), [Chef Leyla](#) and [Antoinette Taus](#), further expanded the campaign's reach.

IN THE NEWS

Between September 1-20, media coverage remained robust, with extensive reporting across various outlets, countries, and languages as part of the Day's global observance. Over 1,067 articles on clean air were published in 615 media outlets across 79 countries and in 17 languages, reflecting substantial media attention. The highest coverage was observed in India, China, Venezuela, the US, the UK, and Russia, showcasing the widespread relevance and urgency of addressing air pollution globally.

Coverage from some of the main global news media outlets included:

- [State Grid initiates green ark program in action to mark International Day of Clean Air for blue skies](#) (Global Times)
- [World Clean Air Day: UN Calls for clean air investment](#) (Sustainability Magazine)
- [Día del Aire Limpio: Gobiernos deben abordar la contaminación](#) (Al Momento)
- [花1元治空气,可换来3.5元回报 | 国际清洁空气蓝天日\(今日头条\)](#)

Two op-eds recently highlighted the economic benefits of tackling air pollution and the cost of inaction. In [Down to Earth](#) and CGTN, [Sheila Aggarwal-Khan](#), Director of UNEP's Industry and Economy Division, emphasized that investing in clean air solutions pays off through improved health, environmental outcomes, and economic growth. On 10 September, [Dechen Tsering](#), Director of UNEP's Asia-Pacific Office, authored a second op-ed in [KiriPost](#), focusing on the urgent need to address Cambodia's air quality issues and the high costs of inaction in Southeast Asia.



Sheila Aggarwal-Khan,
Director of UNEP's Industry
and Economy Division



Dechen Tsering, Director of
UNEP's Asia-Pacific Office

STRENGTHENING MULTILATERAL ACTION TO TACKLE AIR POLLUTION GLOBALLY

On March 1, during the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly ([UNEA-6](#)), a landmark resolution titled “Promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally” ([UNEP/EA.6/Res.10](#)) was adopted. The resolution calls for for stronger regional cooperation and the development of comprehensive national programs and standards to combat air pollution.

In response, the [CCAC](#) launched the Air Quality Management Exchange Platform ([AQMx](#)), a resource hub designed to support air quality professionals globally. AQMx offers tools and guidance aligned with World Health Organization (WHO) [Air Quality Guidelines](#), addressing critical areas like monitoring, emissions inventories, and health impact assessments, to help countries close capacity gaps and meet global air quality targets.

The screenshot displays the AQMx Resource Exchange Library website. At the top, there is a 'Curated Guidance' section with a list of links: Air Quality Monitoring, Source Attribution, Emission Inventory, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainable Development Benefits Assessment, Decision Support, Public Engagement and Communication, and Legal Framework, Policy Design and Implementation. Below this is the 'Resource Exchange Library' section, which features a grid of resource cards. Each card includes a thumbnail image, a title, a brief description, and a 'Reports, Case Studies & A...' link. The cards are: 'Communicating on climate change and... 2024', 'The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2024', 'Mastering Urban Vehicle Access... 2024', 'Beat the Heat: Child Health Amid... 2024', and 'Breathless Beginnings: Policies to Protect... 2024'. A 'See more resources >' button is located below the grid. At the bottom of the page, there are three large statistics: '813 Resources', '16 Themes', and '532 Organizations'. The footer contains the AQMx logo, a 'Home' link, a 'Legal' section with links to Terms of Use, Privacy, Report a Problem/Concern, Report a Bug, and Contact Us, and a 'Why take action' section with a 'Get involved' link.

INVESTING IN CLEAN AIR AROUND THE WORLD

Over 150 live and online events lit up the globe, from Medellín and Mexico City to New York and Atlanta, Riyadh and Erbil, Nairobi and Kampala, and all the way to Beijing and

Paris. Governments, cities, businesses, NGOs, academia, civil society, and individuals all participated actively, contributing to the day's global impact.



ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

UNEP hosted a series of events in the Conference Centre in Bangkok and virtually. The main event on September 6 was the Asia-Pacific Commemoration of the 5th International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. It included “Voices from the Youth,” led by UNICEF Thailand, and a panel discussion on financial strategies and the multidimensional benefits of clean air investments.

On September 5, associated events were organized by UNEP, UNESCAP, Clean Air Asia, and the Hub of Talents on Air Pollution and Climate, with support from the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. These events included: Mobilizing Finance to Accelerate Air Quality and Climate Change Co-Benefits for Asian Cities, highlighting best practices for long-term funding plans, and Invest in Solutions to Reduce Open Burning for Clean Air, focusing on financial mechanisms and policies to eliminate open burning of biomass and agricultural crop residue.

On September 4, UNEP, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) jointly organized Air Pollution Dashboard Donation Event for local schools.



Participants at the China Efforts to Tackle Air Pollution in Shougang Park

In Beijing, UNEP Office in China hosted a session on September 5 at Shougang Park titled China's Efforts to Tackle Air Pollution, which discussed local and national policies aimed at improving air quality and reducing environmental damage. With online and virtual participants, the events in Bangkok and Beijing reached approximately 280 attendees.

NORTH AMERICA

Together with the CCAC and World Resources Institute (WRI), UNEP hosted a hybrid event on September 5 in Washington, D.C., to highlight the urgency of both national and global action on air quality. The event, with nearly 250 participants, raised awareness about the urgency of national and global action to improve air quality. Jennifer Littlejohn from the U.S. State Department delivered keynote remarks, and John Haynes from NASA presented air quality satellite tools.

A panel discussion on cross-border collaboration to reduce air pollution followed, featuring speakers from UNEP, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the United Kingdom government.



Speakers at the UNEP North America event in Washington, D.C.



New York UN Headquarters event for Clean Air Day

NEW YORK

On September 5, UNEP hosted [an event](#) at the UN Headquarters, focusing on local air quality issues in the South Bronx, New York City. The event brought together 50 representatives from Member States, including the Republic of Korea, Chile, and South Africa, alongside key stakeholders such as UNICEF, Columbia University and South Bronx Unite, environmental advocates, public health activists and pollution experts. [Discussions](#) centred on the need for increased cooperation and investment in clean air solutions to address the health and environmental challenges faced by communities in urban areas.

AFRICA

UNEP hosted an [online event](#) on August 28, [Improving Urban Air Quality through Sustainable Waste Management in African Cities](#), with around 50 participants, including UNEP's Deputy Director for Africa. The [webinar](#) highlighted Africa's efforts to achieve clean air through sustainable waste management, in line with [AMCEN's resolution](#) to eliminate open waste burning by 2040

In partnership with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), South Africa's Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), African Group on Atmospheric Sciences (ANGA), African Union Commission (AUC), and the National Association of Clean Air ([NACA](#)), UNEP organized a [hybrid session](#) at the NACA conference in South Africa. This workshop, with over 125 participants, focused on decision support tools for air quality management, aiming to empower stakeholders across government, academia, civil society, and the private sector to improve air quality in the SADC region.

Additionally, UNEP partnered with Moja Expressway, SEI, Athletics Kenya, and ROAM Electric to organize a [press briefing](#), spotlighting the integration of electric vehicles and air quality monitoring during the Nairobi City Marathon. Real-time pollution data was displayed, and a tree-planting ceremony followed.



Live pollution data tracked throughout the Nairobi City Marathon.



The hybrid event in Mexico focused on healthcare costs of air pollution, investments in air quality monitoring, green energy, and the transport sector.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

On September 6, an [hybrid event](#) took place in Mexico, organized by the Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and Health, in collaboration with the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC) and the National Center for Preventive Programs and Disease Control (CENAPRECE), with support from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the office. This event was joined by more than 270 attendees.

Additionally, UNEP hosted a virtual workshop titled Edit-a-thon: International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. The event aimed to equip participants with the skills to contribute content to [Wikipedia](#), addressing knowledge gaps on air quality topics. Participants engaged in interactive sessions, enhancing their understanding of how to improve the visibility of key concepts related to UNEP's work.

EUROPE

Together with the Ministry of Ecology of Uzbekistan, Uzhydromet, the Zamin International Public Foundation, WHO, UNECE and the Finnish Meteorological Institute, UNEP hosted a virtual roundtable on September 6: *Measures to Improve Air Quality to Reduce Risks to the Environment and Public Health*. The event brought together experts, government agencies, and international organizations to discuss strategies for improving air quality and reducing environmental and public health risks.

The third *Air Quality Central Asia (AQCA) Platform* was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on September 19-20, bringing together over 85 participants to discuss regional efforts to improve air quality. The hybrid event covered topics such as air quality monitoring, sand and dust storms, health impacts of air pollution, regulations, and nature-based solutions, with participation from key civil society organizations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.



Highlights from the third Air Quality Central Asia (AQCA) Platform in Astana, uniting regional efforts to improve air quality.

WEST ASIA

The UNEP Regional Director for West Asia gave an interview to Al Ghad, emphasizing the global responsibility to invest in clean air. Awareness materials were distributed to UNICs and government agencies, with countries like Qatar or the UAE calling for collaborative efforts from both governments and citizens to improve air quality.



We would like to acknowledge Funding Partners the contribution made by all our partners who supported the observance of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.

There was large scale participation across different government bodies, UN agencies and key partners to make this Day a resounding success.

Resources were contributed by the Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea. Coordination for the Day is led by UNEP's Pollution and Health Unit, UNEP's Communication Division and the CCAC.

Leading Coordinating Partners



Funding Partners



Collaborating Agencies



For further information:

Atif Butt

Chief, Public Advocacy & Communication

United Nations Environment Programme

atif.butt@un.org

Soraya Smaoun

Coordinator - Air Quality, Pollution and Health Unit

United Nations Environment Programme

soraya.smaoun@un.org



International Day
of Clean Air
for blue skies



Ministry of Environment
Government of the Republic of Korea

Emphasizing the need to make further efforts to improve air quality, including reducing air pollution, to protect human health; acknowledging that improving air quality can enhance climate change mitigation and that climate change mitigation efforts can improve air quality; the United Nations General Assembly decided to designate 7 September as the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. The inaugural observance was marked in 2020, calling for global action to beat air pollution.

