

MAURICE STRONG (1929 – 2015)



LATE LAST YEAR, THE WORLD LOST ONE OF ITS GREATS WHEN MAURICE STRONG, THE FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNEP, PASSED AT THE AGE OF 86 – JUST DAYS BEFORE THE PARIS AGREEMENT THAT IS, IN MANY WAYS, A LEGACY OF HIS LIFE OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP.

Maurice Strong was a truly exceptional human being and a leader in the global family. Few individuals can claim to have shaped the course of history over the past 50 years in the way Maurice Strong did, and he continued to exert huge influence until the last days of his life.

His courageous leadership allowed the Stockholm Conference of 1972 to make history by launching a new era of international environmental diplomacy, which saw the birth of UNEP, the first UN agency to be headquartered in a developing country. He accepted the appointment to become UNEP's first Executive Director and moved to Kenya to establish UNEP's iconic global headquarters on what was then a coffee farm on the outskirts of Nairobi.

Maurice Strong will forever be remembered for placing the environment on the international agenda and at the heart of development. He shepherded global environmental governance processes – from the original Rio Earth Summit, Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration to the launch of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

At the 2014 UN General Assembly, Maurice Strong called on world leaders to “rise to their historic responsibility as custodians of the planet, to take decisions that will unite rich and poor, North, South, East and West, in a new global partnership to ensure our common future”.

This call to action – building on the sustainability road-map which started in Stockholm and continued in Rio, Johannesburg and Rio+20 – became reality last year with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement. There can be no more fitting tribute to Maurice Strong's legacy.

UNEP mourns his loss, and is grateful to this day for the vision and leadership he brought to the environmental challenges of our generation and his role in forging a new vision for sustainable development.