

The Impact of the Stockholm Conference on the UN System: Reflections of 50 Years of Environmental Action

“A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference, we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well-being depend.”

These words in paragraph six of the chapeau to the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment are as true today as they were 50 years ago when governments gathered in Sweden for the first-ever United Nations environmental conference—the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

In Stockholm, governments agreed to defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations in harmony with the “fundamental goals” of peace and of worldwide economic and social development. Fifty years later, heads of United Nations agencies and multilateral environmental agreements have reflected on the impact of the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the United Nations system, the success stories and challenges of the past 50 years, and the challenges and opportunities going forward.

This report synthesizes the information provided by the leaders of these programmes, funds, specialized agencies and multilateral environmental agreements. The information in this report is based on interviews or written submissions from the heads of 37 different UN specialized agencies, programmes and funds, and multilateral environmental agreements that are members of the UN Environment Management Group. Twenty-two interviews took place between 18 February and 15 March 2022 on Zoom. Each interview lasted from 20-30 minutes. Fifteen additional agency heads provided written responses.

The interviews addressed the following questions:

- How has your agency incorporated the environment into its work since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment?
- What have been the key successes and challenges?
- Going forward into the next 50 years, what do you think are the greatest opportunities and challenges for the UN system, and your agency in particular, to address the planet’s environmental challenges?

The responses to these questions provide the basis for this synthesis report.

Stockholm 1972: 50 Years Thence

The Stockholm Conference was a watershed moment that succeeded in bringing environment to the global stage. Before 1972, most people saw environmental issues as local -- pollution of rivers, lakes,

and streams, air pollution over their cities, and oil spills affecting their coastline. The Stockholm Conference and the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)—one of the conference’s most important and lasting legacies—was instrumental in raising awareness that many environmental issues are global and require intergovernmental cooperation to address them.

Stockholm also marked the beginning of environmental diplomacy and catalyzed a new era of multilateral environmental cooperation and treaty-making. Prior to 1972, the structure of international environmental law was largely based on a transboundary and bilateral framework. The post-Stockholm recognition of environmental problems backed by scientific evidence and the need for global cooperation led to the development of numerous multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Among them, the 1987 Montreal Protocol relied on science to identify which chemicals were depleting the Earth’s ozone layer. The 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora now protects 38,000 species of animals and plants through regulating or banning international trade in species under threat. The 1989 Basel Convention ensures that toxic waste can no longer be dumped in Africa and other developing countries. These and other MEAs have been critical to many successful efforts to protect people and planet, from tackling climate change and mercury poisoning to protecting species and biodiversity, to addressing ocean dumping and chemical pollutants.

The Stockholm Conference also had a profound impact at the national level. Many countries established environment ministries and developed their own environmental laws and policies. Countries have since established environmental courts and tribunals and there is increasing environmental litigation at the national level, including on climate change.

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference. The Earth Summit adopted the Rio Declaration, which was a direct outgrowth of the Stockholm Declaration. Similarly, the programme of action adopted in Rio, Agenda 21, updated the Stockholm Action Plan to address the sustainable development issues on the eve of the 21st century. The Earth Summit also led to the development and adoption of a new set of MEAs that addressed environmental problems at the climate-biodiversity-pollution nexus, including the three so-called Rio Conventions: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit, and 40 years after Stockholm, governments gathered again in Rio de Janeiro for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). This conference set in motion the process to negotiate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted in 2015. The SDGs have served to operationalize sustainable development at the international, national, and local levels—taking the concepts that first surfaced at the international level in Stockholm to the next level. The adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 also recognized environmental degradation as a key risk driver and highlighted the value of ecosystems in reducing disaster risk. The Paris Agreement on climate change was also adopted in 2015, calling on countries to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century.

Taking a step back, the biggest success since Stockholm has been carrying the environment from the fringes to the mainstream. The world has realized that people cannot pollute their way to development. While, in 1972, the environment was more perceived as a stand-alone issue, today the world recognizes

that it cuts across all dimensions of development. Today, youth are demanding change. Governments, cities, and regions are acting. Businesses are acting. Investors are acting. As a result, there has also been greater integration of the environment into food security, human settlements, trade, security, and human rights. In fact, in 2021 the UN Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

Stockholm also spurred action across the UN system. Agencies, programmes, and funds have integrated environmental research, technology development, plans, and goals throughout their work. There is a better understanding of how the response to environmental threats and challenges can be turned into development opportunities. In 2001, the UN created the Environment Management Group (EMG), which consists of 51 specialized agencies, programmes, and organs of the UN, including MEA secretariats. The Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN system 2020-2030 ensures that the UN system aligns its own performance with the principles that it has pioneered internationally. There has been great progress in environmental sustainability and carbon neutrality in UN facilities across the system.

In summary, the Stockholm Conference raised awareness and began a global conversation about the importance of environmental issues. Humans were on a path of extraordinary development and yet suddenly the world was confronted with pollution and loss of ecosystems. People increasingly realized that their collective future faced extraordinary threats to biodiversity and human well-being. Stockholm will always be remembered for being the moment where these threats were brought together. It launched UNEP and along with a new era of multilateral cooperation. It allowed local and national governments to develop policies, guidelines, and a new understanding of environmental challenges. And it gave the impetus to the United Nations family of specialized agencies, programmes, and funds to integrate environmental and sustainable development concerns into their work.

Ongoing Challenges

The language of the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan was clear, articulate, and fairly ambitious. Many environmental issues and the complexity of those issues, including their relationship to economic and social development, were all captured in Stockholm. And yet, 50 years later, the scientific data show that climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are at levels that couldn't have been foreseen in 1972. While Stockholm was a watershed moment that succeeded in bringing environment to the global stage, leading to an explosion of purpose and awareness, and many successes, nature of human activities has not shifted to be in balance with limits of what the natural environment can sustain.

So, while the UN system has had many accomplishments on both the operations and programmatic sides, the past fifty years have not been without challenges. Persuading people to listen to the science took a long time, but now the only dissenting voices are those on the fringes. It has been challenging to overcome vested interests, particularly those focused on short-term profits or election cycles. These are ongoing challenges, but ones that can be addressed by consistently making the case that investing in a healthy environment will bring returns on everything from human health to peace as well as to profits and prosperity. The following is a summary of some of these challenges.

Lack of urgency: While there is now better knowledge and understanding of the science, the causes, and the impacts of environmental issues, this has not been translated into urgent action. Since

Stockholm, the international community has increasingly recognized that environmental change is not something that is marginal to the future of development or to humanity. Environmental change fundamentally affects the life-support systems of the planet and people. But this knowledge and understanding has not led to the necessary implementation and political will.

For example, a recent World Bank [report](#) estimates that the collapse of select ecosystem services provided by nature—such as wild pollination, provision of food from marine fisheries and timber from native forests—could result in a decline in global GDP of USD 2.7 trillion annually by 2030, with low-income countries suffering the most. Moreover, according to [UNICEF](#), approximately one in three children worldwide are still exposed to lead levels that can have lifelong consequences, such as mild mental retardation and neurological damage. The [World Bank](#) also estimates that almost 6.5 million people die prematurely every year because of air pollution and that the global cost of health damages, i.e., mortality and morbidity, attributable to air pollution is USD 8.1 trillion, equivalent to 6.1 percent of global GDP. Without the necessary urgent action, unnecessary deaths and environmental destruction will only continue.

National capacity: The pace of the development and adoption of MEAs exploded after Stockholm in 1972 and Rio in 1992, but many countries still do not have the capacity, technology, financial resources, and institutions to effectively implement their international environmental commitments. Countries need the capacity to enact national legislation to implement treaties and not all are able to do this effectively. While some MEAs are making progress in this regard, implementation suffers when countries cannot put all these structures—and personnel—in place.

Also, while many countries established environment ministries after Stockholm, to this day they are often not considered to be at the highest level of government. And their relatively low position in the ministerial hierarchy often limits their effectiveness in implementing environmental laws and treaties. Furthermore, the legislative frameworks are often not robust enough to protect the environment or deter and punish environmental crimes.

Illegal Trade and Crime: Another key implementation challenge at the national level is criminal activity such as illegal trade in banned chemicals, mercury, and other products, including species of endangered flora and fauna. This type of illegal trade is sometimes linked to international criminal organizations. More partners are needed to share intelligence to combat illegal trade and, in some cases, corruption. Illegal trade conducted over the internet is an increasing problem. So even if a country puts controls on endangered and threatened species or banned chemicals, there still is illegal trade.

Furthermore, governments have not yet elaborated a fully clear and comprehensive vision on the nexus between the environment, crime and terrorism, and socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and unemployment, particularly those facing youth. Specifically, the crime dimension of the environmental challenge is still not a big enough part of the debate. There is not enough awareness and attention to how crime and corruption intersect with the environment, and perhaps as a consequence of that, not enough resources are allocated to tackle the issue.

Finance: While governments recognize the importance of increased finance to enable all countries to respond effectively to environmental threats, new and additional financial resources have not met the growing need. The World Bank estimates that the environmental financing gap over the next decade is several trillion dollars. The annual USD 100 billion in climate finance that developed countries

promised to mobilize in 2009 to help developing countries deal with the effects of a warming planet has not been delivered. This, along with other failed attempts and providing new and additional financial resources—as called for at the 1992 Earth Summit—have contributed to a loss of trust between developed and developing countries.

Developing countries continue to stress that they lack the finance, human resources, and technology to implement MEAs and other global environmental commitments. Many UN specialized agencies, programmes, and funds, and MEAs are working hard to help developing countries. For example, the World Bank is helping to close the gap through a holistic approach to mobilizing public and private sustainable finance than extends its domain to environmental, social and governance dimensions. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has established a special task force for fundraising and developing projects to encourage collaboration and cooperation with all Member States. Yet the need for finance will remain a challenge going forward if developing countries are going to be able to implement MEAs and achieve the SDGs.

Technology: The world is changing swiftly; and the UN system needs to work with countries to ensure that technological advances work with nature, not against it. Many countries have not transitioned to green technologies, either because they do not have access or otherwise do not have the capacity to transition. Thus, to truly embrace technological advances, the way technology is shared and co-created must be more collaborative.

New technologies to be embraced from the obvious example of rapid expansion of renewable energy to using digitalization to capture real-time environmental data and prompt behavioural change. Some of these include using of digital technologies to map groundwater sources and monitor air pollution, or non-digital, lower-cost solutions, like designing more effective water pumps. Space-based technologies, such as Earth observing satellites, are also essential components in environmental research, monitoring, and policy enactment. However, the capabilities of space-based technologies and information remain underutilized and represents significant lost potential, especially in response to climate change and its impacts on the environment.

Fragmentation: Another challenge relates to fragmentation and policy silos. For example, at the international level, many MEA heads agreed that fragmentation has been reduced through the work of the Biodiversity Liaison Group, which enables greater coherence among nine biodiversity-related conventions, and the Joint Liaison Group between the three Rio Conventions, which was established as an informal forum for exchanging information, exploring opportunities for synergistic activities, and increasing coordination. In addition, the EMG provides a vehicle for greater knowledge-sharing and coordination across the UN system. In 2021, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed the “Common approach to integrating biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into UN policy and programme planning and delivery.” This common approach provides the framework to organize collective action and joint delivery to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions across the UN system.

While these efforts have helped reduce duplication and conflicts and strengthen governance and implementation at the global level, it is not always the case at the national level.

At the national level, many government ministries remain siloed, and environmental ministries are often marginalized. There are different focal points in different ministries or offices for different

MEAs, but there is not always the necessary level of communication or collaboration between them. As a result, the treaties may be in place, but coordinated national implementation is not at the expected pace. Targets will mean nothing without meaningful engagement from the infrastructure, agriculture, finance and energy ministries and sectors, for example.

Beyond the MEAs, environmental issues must be integrated into sustainable development, diplomacy, health, disaster risk reduction, human rights, economic development, education, peace, and security. Equality, human rights, and reducing gender-based violence must be addressed in conjunction with climate change, and a whole of government approach is needed. Similarly, a climate security perspective is missing from efforts to prevent violent extremism in politically and environmentally fragile contexts affected by climate change. Disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, and climate change also need to be addressed jointly, not through separate institutions and plans.

Governments cannot solve environmental problems alone: Beyond a whole of government approach, there is also a need to enhance a whole of society approach, including private sector, financial institutions, civil society, women, academia, Indigenous Peoples, children and youth, farmers, and local and regional authorities. The size of the challenge is enormous, but for too long, the environment was seen as an issue for specialists and neither the science nor the policy were easily understood by the public. The situation has changed, and the UN system needs to change as well, particularly in how it interacts with non-state actors and stakeholders. Each stakeholder has a different role to play and needs to be involved.

Of particular importance is the private sector. Many agency and MEA heads agree on the need to bring the private sector to the table, but also to mainstream environment into the private sector. Historically, the private sector has exploited natural resources, rather than managing them. They extract, produce and discard. Furthermore, the environment has not always been well connected with investment. But bringing in industry and the private sector is essential to respond to the triple planetary crisis and to scale up implementation of the SDGs and MEAs. There is a need for more public-private partnerships. The private sector is developing climate change mitigation and adaptation technologies, alternatives for hydrofluorocarbons, plastics recycling technologies, and appliances that are safe, affordable, and green. There is a lot that industry can do, but clear policy guidance is needed. Some MEAs need to engage the private sector to address the problem of transferring polluting industries from one country to another. Environmental problems cannot be solved if pollution and waste are transferred from one country with stronger regulations to another with weaker regulations.

Implementation efforts should include increasing public and private investment in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction resilience measures in sectors critical to health and wellbeing, including health and water, sanitation, and hygiene services. There is also a need to ensure adequate funding is in place to prepare and equip health systems to monitor and respond to environmental health issues, especially those that affect women and children.

Whether it is to make the food supply greener and more climate resilient, improve disaster risk reduction, invest in environment and climate change education, or promote healthy and green livelihoods, UN agencies, governments, scientists, the private sector, civil society, and communities need to join forces to scale-up actions and mobilize resources together, ensuring that the most vulnerable, especially rural farmers, women, and youth are included.

These stakeholders need to be part of the consultative process at the national level when governments are putting together their action plans to submit to the various MEAs and other international agreements. This has not always been the case. Yet, while it is important to open up MEAs and the UN family to these non-state actors, it also brings with other challenges. Inclusivity makes it more difficult to find ways to satisfy all the different groups.

Environmental issues are not static: At no point in human history have people faced such an array of both familiar and unfamiliar risks, interacting in a hyperconnected, complex and rapidly changing world. At the heart of these emergencies are unsustainable development pathways. Every day there are new issues and new challenges and governments and the UN system need to be able to better assess risk and respond.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. This is an environmental and human health matter that had not been anticipated fifty years ago. The environment cannot continue to be placed on the back burner. If humans do not take better care of the environment, everyone will face worse pandemics. It is important to remember that addressing environmental issues is about collective self-interest, which must be recognized today and going forward.

Looking forward: Accelerating Actions for a Healthy Planet and Prosperity for All

Fifty years after Stockholm, there is a triple planetary crisis that could not have been imagined in 1972. As the UNEP Executive Director stated at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP, “Climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste are threatening to pull the very rug out from under the SDGs—and with it whip away our aspirations to end hunger and poverty, deliver peace and equity, and live in harmony with the natural world.” These three crises add up to one interlinked planetary emergency, driven by the unsustainable production of goods and consumption of resources.

It has taken the better part of five decades to bring that environmental dimension of development right into the center. The last fifty years have focused on how to stop doing things that harmed the environment and people as well as prospects for future generations. Looking forward to the next fifty years, there should be increased focus not on just stopping harmful practices but on seizing the opportunity to actually transform societies and economies in a positive way.

This opportunity, at its basic level, is to turn widespread commitment and awareness on the triple planetary crisis into action. The speed at which this transition must happen must be increased. Despite pledges and commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the world is still on a trajectory to a world that is 2.7°C warmer—a world beyond comprehension. The window to transition to a net-zero future is open but closing fast. The next decade is critical.

So, what does the UN system need to do to take advantage of this opportunity going forward?

First, the UN system must work with countries and other stakeholders to address the **triple planetary crisis** of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. To do this, it is necessary to:

- Stop valuing nature at zero or close to zero.

- Scale up investments for environmentally-sound poverty reduction.
- Work with nature to reduce climate-induced disasters and improve disaster risk reduction by mainstreaming a systems-based and risk-informed approach in planning, investment, and decision-making at all levels.
- Reshape energy, transport, and food systems around decarbonization and circularity, including through the development of renewable fuels for aircraft and shipping.
- Transform climate-induced food security into an opportunity for environmentally sustainable agri-food systems.
- Restore degraded land for food production, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation.
- Ensure greater access to finance for both climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Integrate and sequence climate resources, risk financing and insurance models with traditional financing approaches.
- Focus on both human health and the health of the planet that humans depend on.
- Pay more attention to the relationship between environmental degradation and zoonotic diseases.
- Change consumption and production patterns to protect nature and habitat and reduce pollution and waste.
- Address the corruption that contributes to the illegal wildlife trade and the illegal construction of cities, industries, and roads in areas with critical wildlife habitat.

On **economics and finance**, it is time to challenge the notion that growing GDP is the only way to measure success of failure. It is time to reinvent an economy for the 21st century. This can be called a green economy or a circular economy; the labels are many, but the direction is singular: decouple economic development from its destructive footprint. Economic decisions need account for the global public goods that nature provides. Other recommendations include:

- Use resources and materials more efficiently.
- Decouple economic development from its destructive footprint by scaling up net-zero, nature-positive and ‘net resilience gain’ financing.
- Transform economic and financial models so that capital backs planet and people, as well as profit.
- Remove regulatory barriers and perverse incentives that currently prevent us from scaling up investment in ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions.
- Transform harmful subsidies, including those backing fossil fuels and fisheries, for example, into pro-poor environmental subsidies.
- Leverage trade to incentivize and enable sustainable production and consumption practices.
- Build greater political commitment to mobilize the necessary financial resources to implement environmental goals.
- Move beyond the reliance on official development assistance and look to a more holistic approach to mobilizing public and private finance for sustainable development.
- Re-evaluate financial mechanisms to reflect that the world economic order is changing, and the world is no longer so clearly divided by the terms “developed” and “developing” countries.
- Recognize that environmental sustainability has profound implications for employment. Over one billion jobs depend on a healthy environment. Preserving and restoring the natural assets that underpin economic activity and human livelihoods can lead to more and better jobs.

- Invest today to minimize tomorrow's risks. The most vulnerable countries, communities and people need to be supported decisively and comprehensively to reduce the risk they already face and to develop in a manner that will not result in further environmental degradation, insecurity, and vulnerability down the line.

To make lasting change, there must be better **collaboration and cooperation** across environmental efforts within the UN, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Rather than everyone focusing on their own mandate, there is a strength in coming together and calling for change. International cooperation, including in the UN system, is critical. Through each agency's respective mandate, and collective and coordinated action, impact at scale can be reached and better respond to the needs of countries. More specifically, it is important to:

- Strengthen multilateralism across ministries and agencies that deal with environment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and other sectors such as rural development, urban planning, infrastructure, and energy.
- Listen to the voices of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.
- Collaborate with the private sector, including small and medium businesses in developing countries.
- Actively and systemically facilitate discourse among local communities, decision-makers, and the private sector on local priorities, solutions, and evidence on impacts
- Avoid duplication and use existing frameworks, like the SDGs, to build on what exists and improve it.
- Promote better integration at the national level through streamlining MEA reporting and increasing collaboration among national focal points for the different MEAs.
- Build platforms to connect and convene local, national, regional, and international actors where different MEAs and other programmes can be better integrated and discussed together.
- Ensure that the new global biodiversity framework and its targets lead to greater coherence and allow MEAs to align their strategic plans.
- Enhance synergies in means of implementation, including capacity building, science, data, technology, and access to funding.
- Provide resources to help countries build capacities, raise awareness, and improve legal frameworks and institutions to pursue justice against those that commit crimes that affect the environment.
- Identify further opportunities to improve the UN system's own environmental performance and resource efficiency, and design systems and processes that are scalable over time to achieve progressively stronger outcomes to support and protect the environment.

Stockholm started the process of **raising public awareness** about the global nature of environmental problems. Today, the need for public awareness is greater than ever. Recommendations include:

- Raise awareness about how people rely on nature to meet their needs and better communicate the cost of environmental degradation and disasters, and the value of resilience and environmental protection measures.
- Raise awareness about the impact of species loss due to trade and habitat loss.
- Appreciate the important role of the media and social media to raise awareness of environmental threats and opportunities.

- Invest in environment and climate change education for children and young people that focuses on building green skills and resilience techniques, in turn empowering them to participate in the growing green economy.
- Encourage businesses to expand opportunities for young people and support them on their path to building healthy livelihoods.
- Work with partners to engage local communities, wherever feasible, in the protection and sustainable use of natural resources and raise awareness of the interconnections between healthy ecosystems and food security.

Science, technology, and data need to be both accessible and used effectively. In addition to strengthening the role of science across the board, recommendations include:

- Effectively and urgently improve global access to relevant data, science, and information to stimulate technological innovations, enable evidence-based and inclusive policymaking, and empower all societies to achieve sustainable development.
- Jointly collect, compile, and analyze data from multiple sources to improve and mainstream early warning systems and prioritize integrated preparedness actions.
- Enable the science-policy bodies to speak with a consistent voice and spur international, national, and local policymaking.
- Enable policymakers and industry to discuss and identify ways to use and share data for poverty reduction, humanitarian purposes, and climate action, among others.
- Connect local communities and decision-makers to climate science and knowledge about risks and impacts.
- Make information and communication technologies widely available to support local technology innovation, which in turn can positively impact economic growth, reduce existing inequalities, and help address global environmental issues, including climate change.
- Facilitate the use of space technology in addressing environmental challenges and to enhance international cooperation in this area.

Fifty years after Stockholm, the greatest challenge may still be the issue of political will. Governments come together, agree there are environmental challenges, and acknowledge the need to work together to confront and reverse. But the time for lofty speeches and commitments is over. It is time for implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic and the insufficient global response cannot be repeated with climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. A greener, more resilient, and more equitable world where nobody is left behind is within reach. However, it requires deep changes in economic and social systems. The UN system is up to the challenge.

Interviews and Written Submissions

Interviews:

- Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe
- Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director, International Trade Centre
- Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
- Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
- Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency
- Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
- Kitack Lim, Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization
- Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs
- Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
- Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions
- Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director, UN Population Fund
- Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary-General, International Civil Aviation Organization
- Meg Seki, Executive Secretary, Ozone Secretariat
- Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN Human Settlements Programme
- Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa
- Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN Development Programme
- Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General, World Meteorological Organization
- Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Written Submissions:

- Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme
- Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO
- David Beasley, Executive Director, World Food Programme
- Grete Faremo, Executive Director, UN Office for Project Services
- Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator
- Niklas Hedman, Acting Director, United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs
- David M. Malone, Rector, United Nations University
- David Malpass, President, World Bank Group
- Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization
- Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF
- Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization
- Monika Stankiewicz, Executive Secretary, Minamata Convention
- Antonio Vitorino, Director General, International Organization for Migration
- Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director, UN Office on Drugs and Crime
- Zhao Houlin, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union