



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH

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INFORMATION
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ON UNEP'S WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

***NATIONAL COUNCIL, ALGIERS, ALGERIA
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Distinguished and honoured guests,
Dear young friends,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Every day, the environment is gaining prominence in policy debates, in the columns of newspapers and simply in every day life.

More and more citizens of the planet understand the importance of a healthy environment and see it as part of their birthright.

Young people, in particular, understand this.

In response, we at UNEP have developed a very active programme to engage young people on environmental issues.

Our current long-term strategy for children and youth is entitled "Tunza", which means "to treat with care or affection" in the Kiswahili language, which is spoken throughout East Africa, including Kenya, where UNEP is based.

The Tunza programme is YOUR programme. Part of it is designed to help to educate you about the environment: through publications, through competitions, through a web site, and through meetings such as this one.

But it does much more than this.

Tunza aims to be a networking opportunity for you and a partnership opportunity for us.

We want to learn from you, listen to you and involve you directly in our events.

Many children and youth have been instrumental in organizing our conferences, and I hope to see at least some of you later this year in Putrajaya, Malaysia—where a Junior Board of nine members between the ages of 10 and 14 is already advising us on the theme, the working groups, the field trips and much more.

Involving children in our events is also a way for us to get new ideas from you on how we can help you to make a difference in your communities.

The theme of this week's events for World Environment Day is Deserts and Desertification: Don't Desert Drylands!.

Drylands, which is where desertification is taking place, are home to nearly 2 billion people, almost all of them in developing countries.

In these areas infant mortality is twice as high as in non-dryland areas, and 10 times the rate found in developed countries.

How we address the issue of drylands directly affects the health, education and prospects for a prosperous and fulfilled lives for hundreds of millions of children and young people around the world.

It is an issue of tremendous importance for governments, for organizations such as UNEP, and for you.

In closing, I would like to leave you with just a few more words of encouragement.

We live in a complex world and it may seem to you that the problems we face are too great.

You might think that you are too young to do anything. But, in fact, you can make a big difference. There is an African proverb that I have learned which says: “It takes more than one stick to start a fire”.

It means that you all have different talents and ideas, but when you use your knowledge and work together towards a common goal you will succeed.

On behalf of UNEP, I would like to thank you for your participation today, and I look forward to your continued engagement in our activities for children and youth.

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