

Message from Achim Steiner for World Environment Day

World Environment Day (WED) 2008 uses the theme of Kick the *CO₂* Habit to catalyze grassroots action on the challenge of this generation—climate change. It is more than a strong and catchy phrase. If we are to move the global economy to a greener and cleaner one, a sharp reduction in the inefficient use of fossil fuels allied to an increased up take of renewable energy must be at the centre of the international response.

There are also powerful arguments in favour of the making the transition ‘Towards a Low Carbon Economy’, with ever clearer evidence that this represents a huge opportunity rather than a burden. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation, concludes that greening the global economy might cost as little as a few tenths of global GDP annually over the next 30 years. It will also be a driving force for innovation, new businesses and industries and employment opportunities across the developed and developing worlds.

There are already many encouraging signs. Earlier this year UNEP launched its climate neutral network (CN Net). Countries, including Costa Rica, Norway and New Zealand, our main host for the global WED celebrations in 2008, are among the early movers. These countries, alongside a growing number of corporations and cities, are demonstrating that reducing emissions and engaging in carbon markets brings not only environmental benefits, but social and economic ones too.

UNEP is also a part the CN Net initiative and part of a wider UN one that is working towards climate neutrality across the organization’s buildings, missions and operations. It has the full support of Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary-General, who has made climate change among his top priorities. During 2008, we will look to broaden participation in the CN Net to communities, non-governmental organizations, households and individuals.

There are other promising signals, driven by the existing emissions reductions treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, and the promise of even deeper emissions reductions on the near horizon.

- Close to 60 countries have targets for renewables, including 13 developing countries, while around 80 have market mechanisms in place to encourage renewable energy development.
- Over 20 per cent of new investment in renewable energy is in developing countries, with China, India and Brazil taking the lion’s share with 9; 5 and 4 per cent respectively in 2006.
- Renewables now provide over 5 per cent of global generation and 18 per cent of new investment in power generation.
- The Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol in 2006 mobilized investment in renewables and energy efficiency projects worth close to \$6 billion.
- Emissions trading, developing mostly as a result of the European Union’s Trading Scheme, saw 362 million tonnes of CO₂ traded in 2005 worth around 7 billion Euros.
- UNEP, working with two Indian banks, has developed a household consumer credit market that has brought solar power to 100,000 people on the subcontinent. The initiative is now self-financing and set to be piloted elsewhere.
- The decision at the last climate convention meeting in Bali to include Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) opens the door for forests to be more

widely factored into efforts. The Government of Norway has announced it will provide \$2.7 billion over the next five years as incentives for REDD.

Adaptation funds are also beginning to flow for ‘climate proofing’ economies. There is now an urgent need to secure significant additional funds to assist developing and least developed economies.

There is also a great deal of creativity being stimulated. A Solar Grand Plan for the United States that, by 2050, could supply almost 70 per cent of the country’s electricity and 35 per cent of its energy needs has been proposed. Surplus electricity from solar would be used to compress air which would be stored in aquifers, caverns and so on and used to turn turbines at night.

In America alone \$40 billion worth of heat goes down the drain. A firm is making tiny pumps that extract the heat from warm washing-up water, to supplement a house’s hot water supplies. Icelandic scientists are piloting a project to inject CO₂ into rock strata where it turns into limestone. In Kenya, researchers are isolating the enzymes termites use to convert woody wastes into sugars to put towards environmentally-friendly biofuel production.

So, WED 2008 does not come in a vacuum but is very much part of a global effort to de-carbonize societies that is touching and empowering all areas of private and public life. It is also a milestone along the Bali Road Map that is designed to guide the world to a decisive post-2012 emissions reduction regime by late 2009.

Last year’s WED successfully used the theme *Melting Ice: A Hot Topic?* to catalyze grassroots action by millions of people in close to 100 countries around the world on the climate change challenge. On this special UN day, let us send a loud and clear message that the global public wants the transformational changes already underway to continue and to accelerate—that each and everyone wants personal, corporate and political action to “Kick the CO₂ Habit”.