



**Twelfth Special Session of the Governing Council /
Global Ministerial Environment Forum**

SERVING PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

***"The environmental agenda in the changing world: from Stockholm
(1972) to Rio (2012)"***

Address to the Opening of the High Level Segment

By Dr. Joan Clos

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Your Excellency Mr. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya

Your Excellency, Ms. Graciela Muslera, Minister, Ministry of Housing,
Land Planning and Environment, Uruguay, and President of the UNEP
Governing Council

Your Excellencies,

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished Delegates,

My Colleagues, Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, and Sahle-
Work Zewde, Director-General of UNON

Members of the UN Family, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNEP 40th Anniversary

- It is a pleasure and a privilege to address this 12th Special Session of the Governing Council.
- I am also honoured to be able to mark with you the 40th Anniversary of the United Nations Environment Programme.
- In 1972, the world wisely decided that the future home of international environmental affairs must be where the challenges and opportunities were: here in the developing world, in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Having created a permanent platform for environmental governance, leaders at the time recognized that their efforts would be incomplete if they failed to address the challenge of cities.
- And so in 1976 the Habitat Conference Plan of Action galvanized the world in Vancouver to address a universal development challenge, that is the challenge of rapid urbanization, including its impact on the environment.

UN-Habitat – UNEP Collaboration

- The decision to collocate UNEP and UN-Habitat in Nairobi was not by accident. It was in recognition that our mandates are inseparably intertwined.

- I am proud that our collaboration has never been greater. Let me site a few notable examples:
- The pace of urban expansion, investment and development across East Africa has been remarkable. UN-Habitat and UNEP are working alongside member states to promote energy efficiency in buildings, updating building codes with new standards that respond to realities across this region.
- Together, UN-Habitat and UNEP are engaged in promoting low-carbon practices in the housing sector by means of capacity building and technical assistance to governments and housing institutions.
- We are developing important joint programmes on urban mobility, whereby UNEP's leadership in the areas of technology for cleaner vehicles is combined with UN-Habitat's expertise in urban planning.
- Our agencies have also been collaborating on climate change for a number of years through numerous partnerships. One example is in the Pacific where our distinctive approaches are safeguarding the future. With UNEP leading a comprehensive environmental cost-benefit-analysis and UN-Habitat providing detailed city-wide vulnerability analysis. National and local leaders will be able to make use of the results of these efforts in making decisions about the environment and urban areas.

- And lastly, following our joint work on the green economy, UN-Habitat is now developing specific guides to operationalize principles for use by urban planners.

Rio+20

- In the forty years since Stockholm, Nairobi itself has been transformed from a sedate regional centre, to a dynamic international capital city recognized for its vibrant financial services and innovation, international travel and tourism, agroforestry and technology sectors.
- Nairobi is not alone. Forty city-regions are responsible for two thirds of the total world economy and most of the innovation.
- Never before in our history have so many of us depended on the success of our cities.
- As we move towards Rio+20, I am happy to note that the critical role cities play in ensuring sustainability is increasingly being recognized in the international agenda.
- We cannot hope to address the challenges of environmental degradation, growing slums, poverty and congestion without making our cities work better.
- To do so requires a serious focus on the three pillars of urban sustainability, that is: (i) improved urban planning, (ii) increased

urban productivity; and (iii) better urban legislative and governance frameworks.

- Our cities require it, our citizens deserve no less.

Conclusion

- Let me conclude by congratulating UNEP for forty years of strong global leadership in safeguarding our environment.
- In times of economic crises and political change, it is all too easy to put aside global issues and focus inward on narrow and immediate domestic issues. But it is by addressing global issues that we can deal with immediate domestic problems more sustainably.
- In the words of Maurice Strong, the first Executive Director of UNEP, “We owe at least this much to future generations, from whom we have borrowed a fragile planet called earth”.
- Our world is far too interconnected and interdependent to think that solutions can be found in isolation. This is why this meeting is so important.
- I wish you all a very successful special session and I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.
- Thank you for your attention.