



# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде      برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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**Statement by**  
**Mr. Ricardo Sanchez Sosa**  
**Principal Officer, UNEP New York Office**

**UN Commission on Population and Development, 14 April 2010**

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- As the Commission on Population and Development addresses the theme of 'health, morbidity, mortality and development', the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) would like to bring to this discussion the environment perspective – for a healthy population is dependent on a healthy environment. It is estimated that up to one quarter of the global burden of disease - reaching nearly 35% in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa - may be associated with environmental factors; a burden which could be largely preventable through better environmental and ecosystem management.
  - As the report of the Secretary-General before the Commission underscores, we have witnessed a significant drop in mortality by reducing the incidence of infectious and parasitic diseases. However, even with improvements in nutrition, hygiene and infrastructure and advances in vaccines and medical treatments - the challenges remain formidable – for while we know that environmental conditions have pervasive and multiple impacts on human health – we also know that an estimated 60% of the world's ecosystems are degraded, compromising the health and life-sustaining services that they provide. Compounding these existing challenges, we are faced with the health implications of climate change. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that the principal effects will be increased malnutrition; deaths, disease and injury due to extreme weather events; increased burden of diarrhoeal disease; higher concentrations of ground-level ozone; and altered spatial distribution of infectious disease transmission.
  - The report of the Secretary-General also points to an increase in non-communicable diseases. It is important to underscore that many of these diseases involve environmental risk factors – not least the adverse effects that can be caused by chemicals throughout their lifecycle, and the mismanagement of hazardous waste.
  - The report of the Secretary-General urges a focus on prevention, and policy strategies to improve health that adopt a 'whole-of-government approach' as sectors other than health need to be involved. One of those sectors should be environment, as managing the environment is our first line of defensive in protecting human health.
  - UNEP has made important contributions in the field of environmental health, both to practitioners, as well as to collaborative activities – often with the World Health Organization (WHO) - that have resulted in progress generating scientific research, and addressing specific issues or vulnerable populations.

- For example, UNEP and WHO jointly implemented the Health and Environment Linkages Initiative (HELI) with a view to harnessing the wealth of existing knowledge to make the case for linkage between the two sectors at country level. The Initiative has demonstrated a management method for national ministries to make better use of available evidence – through linked assessments and health and environment impacts and costs and benefits which supports evidence-based economic development policies.
- Another example of our work with WHO involves promoting and demonstrating realistic alternative approaches to DDT usage in vector control. Prevention is a powerful and cost-effective means to fight malaria. Availability and use of insecticidal bed nets, indoor residual spraying and the use of environmental management approaches must be promoted together with community awareness about malaria prevention.
- At the regional level, UNEP and WHO have worked to support ministerial processes. Dialogue and actions involving ministries of health and environment have been active in Europe since the late 1980s and more recently in the Americas, Asia and Africa. In August 2008, the 1st Inter-ministerial Conference on Health and Environment in Africa took place in Libreville. The objective was to secure political commitment for catalyzing the policy, institutional and investment changes required to reduce environmental threats to health, in support of sustainable development. The Conference's Libreville Declaration committed the 52 participating countries to 11 priority actions and, especially, the establishment of a strategic alliance between health and environment sectors as the basis for plans of joint action.
- Finally, I would like to bring to your attention an innovative approach that arose from another regional process – GEO-Health was motivated by a 2002 Declaration of Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas. Under GEO-Health, UNEP and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) have been working to integrate environment and health assessments.
- The GEO Health Project, launched in 2003, had the scope of creating an inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary and participatory space for the production of reliable scientific information for policy makers dealing with environment and health issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. The development of a participatory methodological approach based on environmental and health indicators that could be efficiently applied throughout the region has been one of the major challenges faced, since such approach should account for regional limitations in data, historical series and available technological capacities.
- The current socio-environmental, political, cultural and economic heterogeneity of the region requires the creation of a tool for evaluation that is flexible enough to adapt to all local realities without losing its ability to establish parameters for spatial and temporal comparability in and between the countries in the region.

- After having analyzed the main instruments of environmental assessment applied in the region, the components of GEO Health were linked together, based on the synergies between the UNEP “Global Environment Outlook” (GEO) process and WHO’s HEADLAMP Model (Analysis of health and environment for decision making).
- Once the conceptual framework was finalized, two pilot projects were undertaken in 2007: one in São Paulo, Brazil, and in two locales in Argentina -- a rural community, Chabás in Santa Fe, and a metropolitan area, Munro in Buenos Aires. As result of this process UNEP and PAHO developed this manual which contains practical tools for those who are interested in carrying out such assessment in a participatory manner. (NOTE: Copies of which are available in Spanish and English at the side of the room.)
- The GEO-Health project, born out of the intersectoral efforts of two UN agencies with mandates on environmental protection and vigilance over health matters, provides a firm methodological base to design and apply future integrated policies.
- In closing, allow me to express UNEP’s thanks to the Environment and Health Ministries for their contributions to the project, and to the scientists, researchers and institutions, for their valuable collaboration that made the final product possible. We would also like to give special recognition to the contribution made by the Governments of Brazil and Argentina for permitting the field testing.
- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing UNEP to make this presentation.

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