

# Foreword



Few global issues are more important than the environment and climate change. Since taking office, I have consistently emphasized the dangers of global warming, environmental degradation, the loss of biodiversity and the potential for conflict growing out of competition over dwindling natural resources such as water – the topics which are analysed in the GEO-4 report. Dealing with these issues is the great moral, economic and social imperative of our time.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Rapid environmental change is all around us. The most obvious example is climate change, which will be one of my top priorities as Secretary-General. But that is not the only threat. Many other clouds are on the horizon, including water shortages, degraded land and the loss of biodiversity. This assault on the global environment risks undermining the many advances human society has made in recent decades. It is undercutting our fight against poverty. It could even come to jeopardize international peace and security.

These issues transcend borders. Protecting the global environment is largely beyond the capacity of individual countries. Only concerted and coordinated international action will be sufficient. The world needs a more coherent system of international environmental governance. And we need to focus in particular on the needs of the poor, who already suffer disproportionately from pollution and disasters. Natural resources and ecosystems underpin all our hopes for a better world.

## **ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Issues of energy and climate change can have implications for peace and security. This is especially true in vulnerable regions that face multiple stresses at the same time – pre-existing conflict, poverty and unequal access to resources, weak institutions, food insecurity, and incidence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

We must do more to use and develop renewable energy sources. Greater energy efficiency is also vital. So are cleaner energy technologies, including advanced fossil fuel and renewable energy technologies, which can create jobs, boost industrial development, reduce air pollution and help to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. This is a matter of urgency that requires sustained, concerted and high-level attention. It has a broad impact not just on the environment but also on economic and social development, and needs to be considered in the context of sustainable development. It should be a concern to all countries, rich or poor.

Energy, climate change, industrial development and air pollution are critical items on the international agenda. Addressing them in unison creates many win-win opportunities and is crucial for sustainable development. We need to take joint action on a global scale to address climate change. There are many policy and technological options available to address the impending crisis, but we need the political will to seize them. I ask you to join the fight against climate change. If we do not act, the true cost of our failure will be borne by succeeding

generations, starting with yours. That would be an unconscionable legacy; one which we must all join hands to avert.

### **BIODIVERSITY**

Biodiversity is the foundation of life on earth and one of the pillars of sustainable development. Without the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, we will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is an essential element of any strategy to adapt to climate change. Through the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the international community is committed to conserving biodiversity and combating climate change. The global response to these challenges needs to move much more rapidly, and with more determination at all levels – global, national and local. For the sake of current and future generations, we must achieve the goals of these landmark instruments.

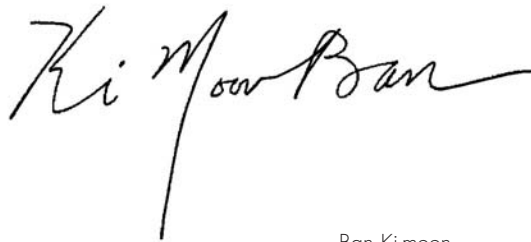
### **WATER**

The state of the world's waters remains fragile and the need for an integrated and sustainable approach to water resource management is as pressing as ever. Available supplies are under great duress as a result of high population growth, unsustainable consumption patterns, poor management practices, pollution, inadequate investment in infrastructure and low efficiency in water-use. The water-supply-demand gap is likely to

grow wider still, threatening economic and social development and environmental sustainability. Integrated water resource management will be of crucial importance in overcoming water scarcity. The Millennium Development Goals have helped to highlight the importance of access to safe drinking water supplies and adequate sanitation, which undeniably separates people living healthy and productive lives from those living in poverty and who are most vulnerable to various life-threatening diseases. Making good on the global water and sanitation agenda is crucial to eradicating poverty and achieving the other development goals.

### **INDUSTRY**

Increasingly, companies are embracing the Global Compact not because it makes for good public relations, or because they have paid a price for making mistakes. They are doing so because in our interdependent world, business leadership cannot be sustained without showing leadership on environmental, social and governance issues.



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