

*UNEP Arctic Council side event  
February 2013*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

In February 2008, when addressing the 10<sup>th</sup> special session of the UNEP Governing Council, as part of the International Polar Year, I called for an extremely urgent debate with all the countries concerned, so as to save the Arctic Region, its populations and its biodiversity.

I urged the Governing Council to focus on this issue in order to put forward concrete solutions. Responding to my call, the Council adopted the decision "Sustainable Development of the Arctic Region", pointing out the concerns related to this region and committing UNEP to cooperate with the Arctic Council.

Five years have passed, many organisations have expressed concerns about this alarming situation - it is now time to examine the results with all the stakeholders involved.

These concerns, which I have not only expressed over the past few years in several fora, but have placed also at the heart of my discussions with the world's leading decision-makers, lead me to address to you this message of encouragement, but also of alert.

Your meeting, within the scope of the United Nations Environment Programme's Governing Council, represents a valuable opportunity to take stock of the Arctic situation, at a time when we are confronted to one bad news after the other for our planet, and in particular for this region.

Today, global warming is a reality that we must not only continue to fight, but which we now need to learn how to manage. Whatever our efforts, whatever our future success, we know that unfortunately it will be difficult to maintain global warming at a level with no consequence for the Earth's balance.

Many disruptions are already foreseeable. Among them, the melting of the polar ice sheet has, as you all know, dire consequences. I will not list them all here but I would like to draw your attention on the need to organise sanctuaries to facilitate the adaptation of certain areas and the protection of certain species confronted with these predicted upheavals.

Such sanctuaries already exist on the various oceans across the globe and their effectiveness is currently beyond debate. Therefore, it is vital to increase their numbers, particularly in vulnerable, endangered and yet essential regions for the overall balance of our planet: the Poles.

In the Arctic especially, the development of these initiatives will enable us both to strengthen the fragile ecosystems and to gain a better understanding of the natural mechanisms we need to

protect. It will also prove the economic value of these protective zones and demonstrate the utility of the services they are capable of rendering to humanity.

Such initiatives require bold multilateral cooperation. Not only by the countries situated in the Arctic directly involved. But also by every country in the world, because each one, at varying levels, is dependent on the future of this region responsible for its preservation and contributes to its changes.

Your meeting, alongside the UNEP Governing Council, is therefore an important event. It forms part of global mobilisation efforts paving the way for concerted and efficient multilateral action to promote the preservation of the Arctic regions.

I would like to congratulate in particular Her Excellency Minister Lena Ek, Chair of the Arctic Council, for her initiative in organising this meeting which I hope, using the terms of her invitation, will be "a frank discussion on Arctic issues" and which will enable us to make concrete progress on an issue that concerns us all.

Thank you.