

UNEP – your partner for people and planet

Part 2 50 Years of Environmental Milestones



2025
EDITION

part 2

Making a Difference – 50 Years of Environmental Milestones

Founded in 1972, UNEP was created to monitor the state of the environment, inform policy making with science and coordinate responses to enduring and emergent environmental challenges.

For five decades, UNEP has worked closely with its 193 Member States and other stakeholders to galvanize worldwide commitments and coordinated action to address many of the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

While it is impossible to capture all the progress made, some key environmental milestones from the five decades are presented on the following pages.



Fifty Years of Global Environmental Governance

The Stockholm Conference and the birth of UNEP

For the first time ever, the 1972 **UN Conference on the Human Environment** in Stockholm placed the environment on the global agenda and articulated its links to human well-being and economic growth. This beginning of multilateral environmental cooperation has led to a dramatic increase in global awareness of environmental issues and international environmental law-making.

It also led to the establishment of UNEP - mandated to monitor the state of the environment, inform policymaking with science and coordinate global responses to environmental challenges.

The establishment of UNEP was also a source of inspiration for many countries to create stronger environmental institutions such as Ministries of Environment and national environmental agencies responsible for implementation of policies.

The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992

Twenty years later, the 'Earth Summit' had many great achievements including the **Rio Declaration** and its 27 universal principles, the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, and the **Convention on Biological Diversity**. The 'Earth Summit' also led to the creation of the **Commission on Sustainable Development**, and the **Agenda 21**, a daring program of action calling for new strategies to invest in the future to achieve overall sustainable development in the 21st century.

Rio+20

Forty years later, the third UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, took another leap forward and placed the environment at the centre of the international community's focus, giving it the same level of prominence as issues such as peace, the eradication of poverty, access to health and global security.

The UN Environment Assembly

The outcome document of Rio+20 - The Future We Want - further strengthened UNEP's mandate and governance, and created the **UN Environment Assembly** (UNEA); the global parliament on the environment.

All 193 UN Member States are represented at UNEA, which meets biennially at UNEP's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya to set priorities for global environmental policies, agree on strategic action to tackle environmental challenges and to develop international environmental law. The Assembly also approves UNEP's programme of work.

UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50

The 50th anniversaries of UNEP ("UNEP@50") and the Stockholm Conference ("Stockholm+50") in 2022 remind us of the importance of international cooperation and collective action to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

The political declaration following UNEP@50 acknowledged with appreciation the 50-year contribution of UNEP in supporting a worldwide effort to overcome the planet's

biggest environmental challenges, reaffirmed its role as the leading global environmental authority and supported the strengthening of UNEP and its regional presence.

The Stockholm+50 meeting emphasized the global interconnectedness of the environment and the need to collectively address the triple crisis of our common environment for present and future generations. Leaders made calls for bold environmental action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.



"The UN Environment Assembly shows multilateral cooperation at its best."

Espen Barth Eide, President of UNEA-5 and Norway's Minister for Climate and the Environment

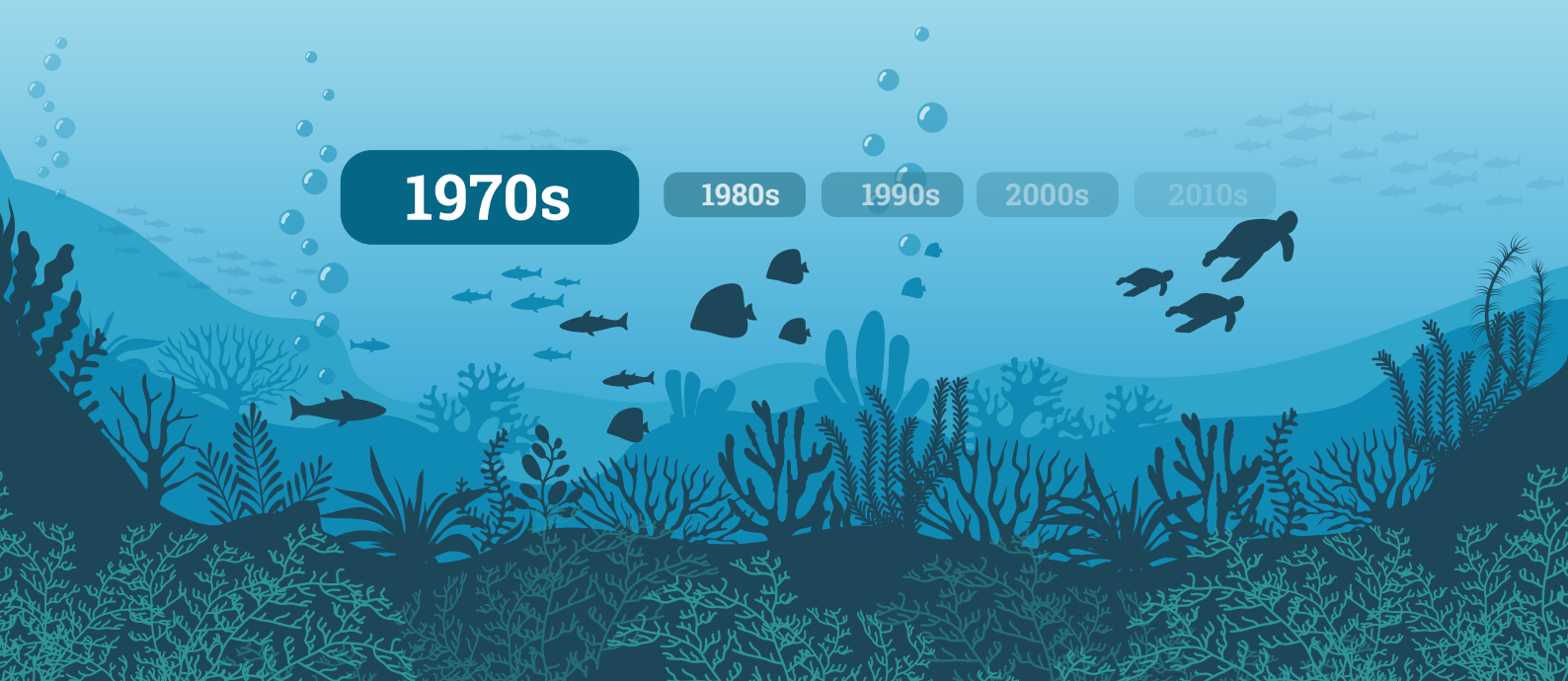


Maurice Strong (right), the first Executive Director of UNEP, with UN Secretary-General U Thant (middle) and Keith Johnson (left), Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference.



Inger Andersen, UN Under Secretary-General and current UNEP Executive Director with António Guterres, UN Secretary-General.

Now, more than ever, the multilateral discussions and actions that UNEP facilitates are crucial for solving the planetary crisis we face.



1972

UNEP established at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment

Held in Stockholm, Sweden, **this landmark conference** produced the **Stockholm Declaration** which placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns.

1973

Regulation of trade in wildlife

CITES, or the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** regulates trade in more than 38,000 wild species. UNEP administers the CITES Secretariat based in Geneva.

First World Environment Day

The first-ever **World Environment Day** mobilized millions to speak out and act in line with the theme “Only One Earth”. Held annually on 5 June, it has become a global celebration and awareness raising event.

1979

States adopt Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

The **Bonn Convention** provides a global platform to develop and implement policies for the protection of migratory animals and their habitats. It currently protects more than 600 creatures, from great white sharks to monarch butterflies. UNEP provides the secretariat to this convention.

Toward clean seas and a global agreement on plastic pollution

The 1970s saw the start of intensified international cooperation to protect our oceans. Fifty years later, a historic milestone in the fight against plastic pollution was reached at the fifth resumed session of the UN Environment Assembly (2022) when countries called to **End Plastic Pollution** including marine litter and microplastics, and to forge an international legally binding agreement by 2024.

The commitment continued an effort to protect our seas that began in 1974 with the **Regional Seas Programme**. Considered a **crown jewel** of environmental diplomacy, it is one of UNEP's most significant achievements in the protection of the coastal and marine environment, combining science with policy to produce effective shipping treaties, while highlighting issues such as coral reef destruction, and the restoration and protection of blue carbon ecosystems. 146 countries have joined 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean to the South Pacific. Of these, seven are hosted by UNEP. The cumulative impact of these conventions and policies over the past 45 years are chronicled through a series of case studies in the **The Contributions of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to a Healthy Ocean**.

The Regional Seas initiative sparked a series of UNEP-led initiatives over the ensuing five decades. In 1995, UNEP became the secretariat for the **Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities**, the only global initiative directly addressing the connectivity between terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems through the pollution lens.

The growing threat posed by microplastics was first identified in 2011 as part of the **UNEP Year Book**. The following year, UNEP became the secretariat for the **Global Partnership on Marine Litter**.

The **Clean Seas** Campaign to raise awareness and engage action on marine pollution has dropped anchor in 64 countries since 2017, extracting commitments that target the production and consumption of non-recoverable and single-use plastics.

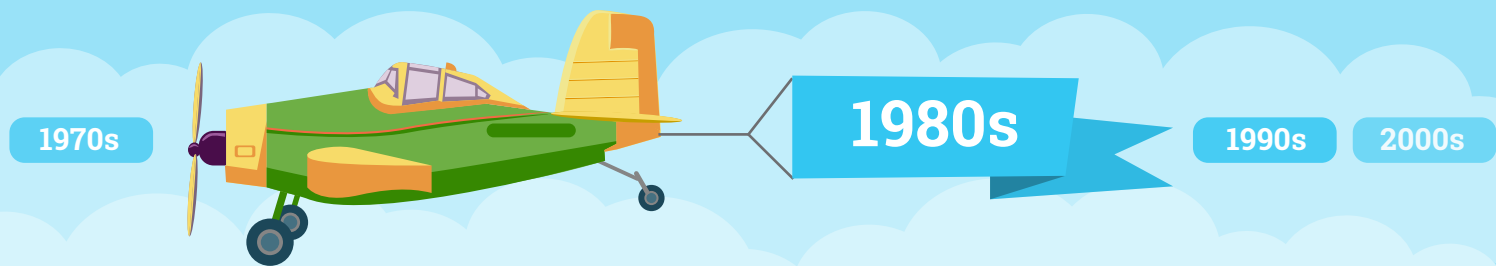
The **Ocean Decade** from 2021 to 2030 provides a framework to ensure that ocean science can support countries' actions to sustainably manage the oceans. UNEP evidence will help countries focus attention on marine issues including **coral reef restoration, the value of seagrass and the importance of mangroves to people**.

UNEP's **From Pollution to Solution: a global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution** from 2021 highlights that 11 million metric tons of plastic flow into aquatic ecosystems every year, a number set to triple by 2040 without deliberate action. This is why the steps taken by UNEA towards ending plastic pollution are crucial.

"We are ready to do our utmost to end plastic pollution worldwide, and we welcome the decision by the Environment Assembly to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee towards an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution."

Ministerial Declaration from UNEA 5.2





1982

UNEP adopts the Montevideo Programme

The Montevideo Programme established priorities for global environmental lawmaking and led to major agreements, including the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam conventions, and the Montreal Protocol. It supports 120 governments in developing environmental legislation. UNEP is currently stewarding the fifth **Montevideo Environmental Law Programme** (2020-2030) to support stronger environmental rule of law.

1983

Brundtland Commission created, 'sustainable development' introduced

The Commission was tasked to propose long term environmental strategies to achieve sustainable development. The setting up of such a special commission was proposed by the UNEP Governing Council to the UN General Assembly in 1983. The Brundtland Commission report **Our Common Future** that was released in 1987 introduced and defined the term 'sustainable development' and how it could be achieved.

1988

Launch of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC launched by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization provides governments with scientific information to develop climate policies. Its **latest report**, which UN Secretary-General António Guterres called a "code red for humanity," found that global heating is affecting every region on Earth and that in some places, climate change has become irreversible.

1989

States restrict movement and disposal of hazardous waste

Signed by 183 states, the **Basel Convention** places strict rules on the movement and disposal of hazardous waste. Since 2013, the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions have been merged into **one secretariat** supported by UNEP.

Rebuilding the ozone layer while curbing climate change

In the mid-1970s, scientists warned that man-made chemicals in everyday products like aerosols, foams, refrigerators and air-conditioners were harming the ozone layer. In 1985, they confirmed the presence of a hole in the stratospheric ozone layer over Antarctica: a breach in the world's natural sun shield, which protects humans, plants, animals and ecosystems from excessive ultraviolet radiation. Scientists raised the alarm, and the world listened.

In 1985, governments adopted the **Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer** which provided the framework for the landmark **Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer** (1987) marking a turning point in environmental history. The Protocol regulates the production and consumption of some 100 manmade chemicals and demonstrates that when science and political willpower join forces, the results can change the world. The Protocol came into effect in 1989 and by 2008, it was the first UN treaty to be ratified by every country in the world.

The results have been dramatic. Around 99 per cent of ozone-depleting substances have been phased out and the protective layer above Earth is being replenished. The Antarctic ozone hole is expected to close by the 2060s, while other regions will return to pre-1980s values even earlier. Every year, an estimated two million people are saved from skin cancer.

The Protocol was amended in 2016 to also require phase-down of powerful greenhouse gases through the **Kigali Amendment** which could contribute to preventing as much as 0.4°C in temperature rise by the end of the century – a considerable proportion within the context of the global 2°C limit agreed at the Paris climate conference.

UNEP has played a key role in this success story. In 1976, UNEP held an international conference that enabled scientists from 32 countries to meet and agree on a world plan of action for ozone. Later, UNEP brokered the Vienna Convention and has since 1991 hosted the Ozone Secretariat at its Kenyan headquarters. The Secretariat organises conferences and meetings for the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol and manages the implementation of decisions resulting from those conventions and meetings. UNEP also hosts the Multilateral Fund Secretariat in Montreal, which supports the Protocol's financial mechanism, and the Treasurer, in Nairobi, which manages the associated trust fund.

Under its mandate as an Implementing Agency of the Multilateral Fund, UNEP's OzonAction Branch supports 147 developing countries to achieve and sustain their compliance obligations with the Protocol. (See also p.32)

» <https://tinyurl.com/4b33kymh>



1991

Launch of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)

GEF was established to tackle the planet's most pressing environmental problems. The partnership between UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank has thus far united 184 member governments to contribute more than US\$ 21.5 billion in grants for some 5,000 projects. It has also mobilized US\$ 117 billion in co-financing.

1992

UN holds Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro

At the UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, 175 countries commit to a plan to achieve sustainable development in the 21st century. The Earth Summit adopts the landmark **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development** and launches **Agenda 21**.

Leaders sign Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD)

This **international legal instrument** governs the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from use of genetic resources. Ratified by 196 nations, the convention has spurred governments to expand protected areas, mobilized financial resources in support of biodiversity protection and promoted sustainable fisheries and agriculture. UNEP administers the secretariat of the CBD.

1994

Global fight against desertification intensifies with establishment of UNCCD

For nearly 50 years, UNEP has played a key role in the **global fight against desertification** including through the formation of the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** – the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management – and by supporting its subsequent actions, such as the **Great Green Wall for the Sahel and Sahara Initiative**.

» <https://tinyurl.com/u4rdsu57>

1997

UNEP releases first edition of flagship Global Environment Outlook (GEO)

The **GEO** is a flagship UNEP publication linking science to policy and informing decision makers at multiple levels about the state of the planet. Contributions from the whole UN family and governments' nominees of scientists and academics have turned the GEO into a key tool for decision makers on environmental matters. The 6th GEO was published in 2019.

1998

The Rotterdam Convention on trade with hazardous chemicals established

The convention helps countries make informed decisions about whether to import a range of pesticides and industrial chemicals, preventing them from unwittingly accepting potentially dangerous pollutants. The convention entered into force in 2004 and is administered by UNEP.

UNEP Finance Initiative - aligning finance and sustainability

The **UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP FI)** established in 1992 has worked for 30 years to bridge the gap between global financial institutions and the environmental agenda. More than 450 financial institutions, including banks, insurers and investors, work with UNEP FI to understand today's environmental, social and governance challenges, why they matter to finance, and how to actively participate in addressing them.

This work is not only helping people and the planet; it is also securing the future of financial stability. Institutional investors and retail banking customers are **increasingly demanding** that financial institutions uphold environmental standards. A growing number of financial institutions have begun to realize that financing fossil fuels, and other projects that harm the environment, is bad for their long-term future.

Becoming more environmentally sustainable requires a redesign of business models. To shepherd the financial industry towards sustainability, UNEP FI has unveiled a series of guiding frameworks including:

- » **Principles for Responsible Banking** (2019)
- » **Principles for Sustainable Insurance** (2012)
- » **Principles for Responsible Investment** (2006)

Some 80 per cent of the investment industry has committed to the Principles for Responsible Investment while over 270 banks, representing over 45 per cent of banking assets, have signed onto the Principles for Responsible Banking. A 2021 **progress report** found that signatories to the responsible banking principles have mobilized at

least US\$ 2.3 trillion in sustainable financing in 18 months. Additionally, 94 per cent of banks, which have joined the Principles for Responsible Banking, identify sustainability as a strategic priority.

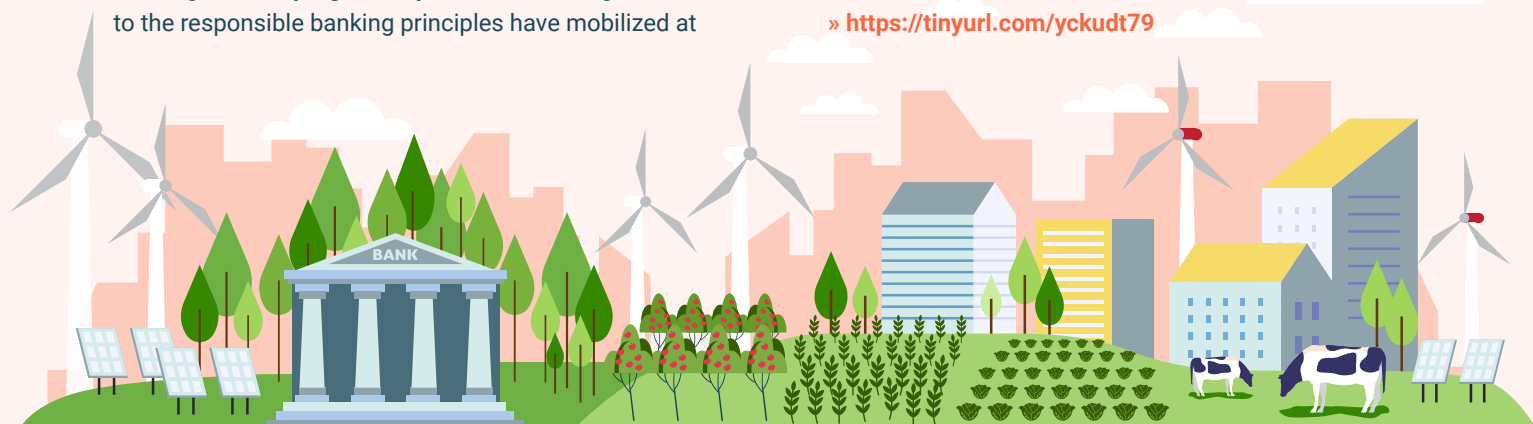
In support of Net-Zero

UNEP FI partners with the **Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero**, to bring together net-zero emissions finance initiatives in one sector-wide coalition, providing a forum for leading financial institutions to accelerate the transition to a net-zero global economy.

Members of the UNEP FI co-convened **Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance** have committed to aligning their investment portfolios with a 1.5°C scenario by transitioning their assets under management, currently at US\$ 10 trillion, to net-zero by 2050. This includes some of the world's largest insurance underwriters, who are implementing policies on coal phase-out and other fossil fuel exclusions. UNEP FI also convenes two net-zero alliances for **banking** and **insurance**.

Ahead of the UN COP26, the **Investor Agenda**, which brings together UNEP FI and key partners, developed an ambitious statement to governments signed by 733 institutional investors from around the world, with more than US\$ 52 trillion in assets under management, calling for a number of measures that would help avoid catastrophic temperature rise and manage climate risk. It was the strongest-ever unified call for governments to end fossil fuel subsidies, phase out coal and mandate climate risk disclosure.

» <https://tinyurl.com/yckudt79>





1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

2001

States adopted Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

The treaty, one of three on chemicals and pollution now jointly administered by UNEP, helps protect human health and the environment from dangerous, long-lasting chemicals by restricting and ultimately eliminating their production, trade and use.

New partnership launched to support populations and habitats of wild great apes

The Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) was launched by UNEP to help ensure the long-term survival of gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans and their habitat in Africa and Asia.

2005

UNEP launched Champions of the Earth

The UN's **highest environmental honour** recognizes outstanding leaders from government, civil society and the private sector whose actions have a transformative impact on the environment.

UNEP and UNDP launched Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI)

The **PEI** provided both financial and technical support for countries to integrate poverty-environment linkages into national and sub-national development planning. The PEI, and its successor the **Poverty Environment Action** launched in 2018, demonstrate how improved environmental sustainability can contribute to poverty eradication.

2006

Towards sound management of chemicals across their life cycle

The UNEP-hosted **Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)** is a platform for Member States and non-state actors and has supported the implementation of a global system of classifying and labelling chemicals, establishment of accident preparedness and poison control centres, and raised the profile of new threats such as endocrine-disrupting chemicals and nanomaterials. Through its **Quick Start Programme**, 184 projects in more than 100 countries contributed to the development of national chemical profiles.

2007

UNEP established the International Resource Panel (IRP)

The Panel provides decision makers and others with scientific assessments on the sustainable use of resources and full life-cycle environmental impacts.

2008

UNEP pioneered “green economy”

UNEP launched its Green Economy Initiative, pioneering the concept of “green economy” as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

Protecting people from mercury

Mercury contamination poses serious health risks to the central nervous system. UNEP has played a crucial role in raising global awareness about mercury and its threats to human health and the environment.

The release by UNEP in 2002 of the first **report on mercury** spurred new global awareness and helped UNEP drive the process of intergovernmental negotiations to ban mercury. Three years later, the UNEP **Global Mercury Partnership** was launched, followed by the agreement (2013) and entry into force (2017) of the UNEP-administered **Minamata Convention on Mercury**. The convention aims to protect human health and the environment from emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds caused by human activity.

UNEP works closely with stakeholders to promote the effective implementation of the convention. Thirty countries were assisted in 2020 to develop national action plans for reducing mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining. This sector provides employment for 10–20 million miners in over 80 countries and is the largest source of mercury pollution in the world, according to UNEP's 2018 **Global Mercury Assessment**.

UNEP also leads the Global Environment Facility-funded **planetGOLD** program, which is working to eliminate mercury from these sectors worldwide.



Saving the world's forests

Covering more than 30 per cent of global land area, forests provide habitat for most terrestrial plant and animal species. Around **1.6 billion people** depend on forests for their livelihoods, and a quarter of all modern medicines come from tropical forest plants. Forests are also essential stores of the carbon dioxide that is warming the planet, taking up 30 per cent of emissions from fossil fuels and industry.

The **State of the World's Forests** report (2020) from UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that 420 million hectares of forest were lost over the past 30 years through conversion to other land uses. Another 100 million hectares are at risk.

UNEP has spent the past 50 years shaking the trees to halt deforestation, despite deep political divides between the industrialized Global North, which has driven forest development, and the developing Global South — where most of the world's surviving forests remain.

In launching the UN Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation **UN-REDD** in 2008, UNEP, FAO and UNDP are demonstrating their commitment to protect forests. Some 65 countries – the

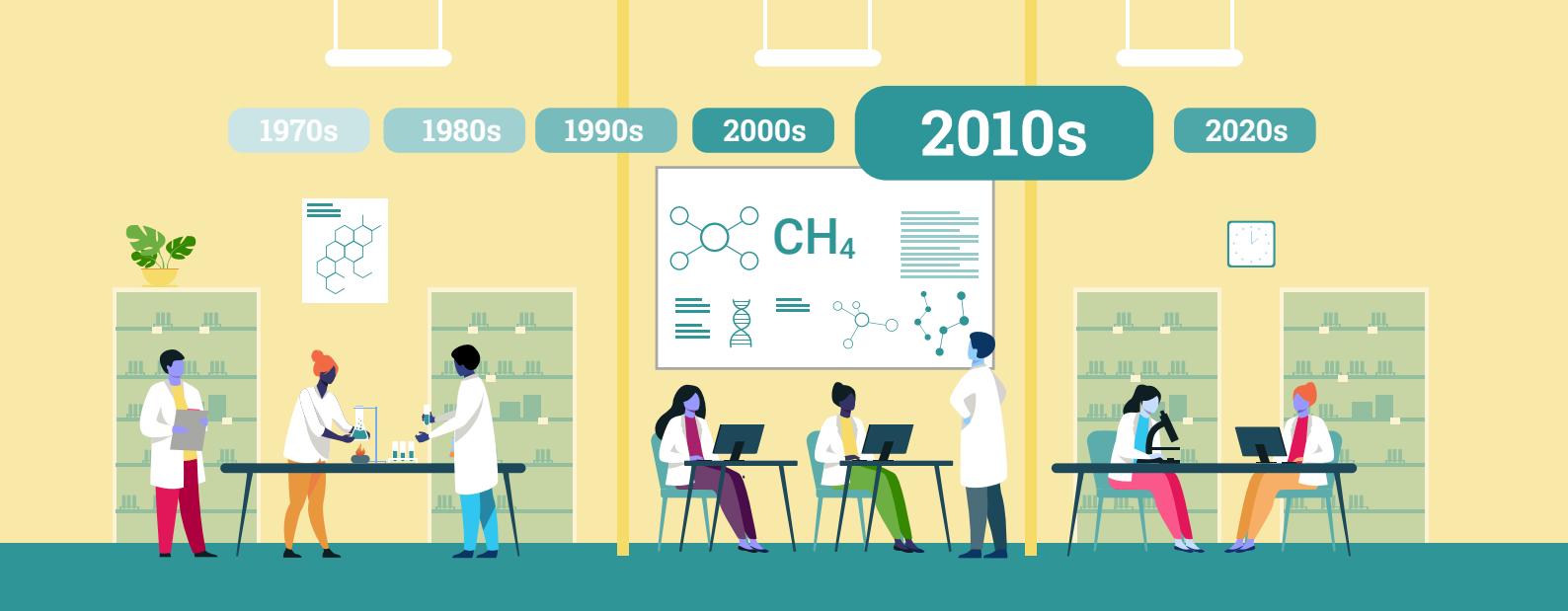
hosts to 70 per cent of the world's tropical forests among them – are enrolled in the programme to reduce forest-related emissions, enhance forest carbon stocks and strengthen indigenous rights, all while contributing to sustainable development.

UN-REDD is spearheading the **Green Gigaton Challenge**, a public-private partnership to catalyse funding to deliver a reduction of 1 gigaton (1 billion metric tons) of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation by 2025 and annually after that. One gigaton of annual emissions reductions is equivalent to taking 80 per cent of the cars off roads in the United States.

At UN COP26 in 2021 more than 140 countries promised to end and reverse deforestation by 2030. The pledge, which includes almost US\$ 19.2 billion of public and private funds, is a landmark win for nature. The protection and restoration of forests is also tied directly to the current **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** (see p.27).

» <https://tinyurl.com/2s3zwxp8>





2010

UNEP released first Emissions Gap Report

This ground-breaking series of annual science-based assessments presents an overview of the difference between where greenhouse emissions are predicted to be in 2030 and where they should be to avert the worst impacts of climate change. **The Heat Is On** from 2021 shows that new national climate pledges combined with other mitigation measures put the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.7°C by the end of the century.

2011

Climate Technology Centre & Network (CTCN) established

The **CTCN**, hosted by UNEP and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), is mandated by the UN Convention Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and matches developing country needs for climate change-related equipment, methods, capacity development and policy advice with the world-class technology expertise of its network.

2012

States launched the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

IPBES provides status updates on biodiversity, drawn from the global contributions of more than a thousand scientists. UNEP facilitated the negotiations to establish IPBES and hosts its Secretariat. Its **landmark 2019 report**, the most comprehensive assessment of its kind, found that one million species are threatened with extinction.

Leaders gather for RIO+20

The UN General Assembly established universal membership of UNEP's governing body during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as **RIO+20**. **UNEP is strengthened and upgraded**, helping to define a new era of international environmental governance.

10YFP and One Planet Network promote sustainable consumption and production

The UNEP-hosted **10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP)** is a worldwide commitment to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production. To support the implementation of the Framework, partners from 193 Member States have formed the **One Planet Network** in areas of public procurement; buildings and construction; tourism; food systems; consumer information; and lifestyles and education. In 2021 UN Member States committed to extend the implementation of the 10YFP beyond 2022.

The Climate and Clean Air Coalition paves way for global commitment on methane

Methane emissions are the second leading contributor to global warming, with a warming potential over 80 times that of carbon dioxide over a 20-year horizon. Methane also has a shorter lifetime in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide – only 12 years, compared to up to hundreds for CO₂ – so cuts to methane will limit temperature increases faster than cuts to carbon dioxide.

The **Climate and Clean Air Coalition** (CCAC) launched in 2012, emphasizes the importance of mitigating short-lived climate pollutants such as methane, black carbon and hydrofluorocarbons. There are 75 state and 78 non-state members in the coalition hosted by UNEP, with hundreds of local actors carrying out activities across all three major emitting sectors: oil and gas, waste, and agriculture.

The **Global Methane Assessment** highlighted that a 45 per cent cut in human-caused methane this decade, including from the fossil fuel industry, would keep warming beneath a threshold agreed by world leaders.

This assessment led to a substantive increase in the focus on methane and influenced the **Global Methane Pledge** launched by the European Union and the United States. By end of 2024, 159 countries, representing over 50 per cent of global man-made methane emissions, have pledged to

reduce methane emissions by 2030, backed by over US\$ 300 million in financing. Delivering on the pledge would reduce warming by at least 0.2 degrees Celsius by 2050, helping keep the limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius warming of the Paris Agreement within reach. In addition, achieving the 2030 goal would prevent over 200,000 premature deaths, hundreds of thousands of asthma-related emergency room visits and over 20 million tons of crop losses a year by 2030.

The European Union has also funded UNEP to develop a new data-driven, action-focused International **Methane Emissions Observatory** (IMEO) to improve the ability to monitor methane emissions from industry. Over 70 companies representing more than 30 per cent of the world's oil and gas production also pledged greater transparency on reporting methane emissions through the **Oil and Gas Methane Partnership 2.0**. The CCAC and the IMEO will play an essential role in the implementation of these commitments.

After **10 years of momentum and achievements**, the CCAC is redoubling its efforts to rapidly deploy solutions to limit global temperature rise and make air pollution a problem of the past.

» <https://tinyurl.com/3xswtpka>



2013

Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) launched

Launched in response to calls for greener and more inclusive growth trajectories, **PAGE** has grown into a prominent alliance of UN agencies, funding partners and 20 countries collaborating to foster economic growth, create income and jobs, reduce poverty and inequality, and strengthen the ecological foundations of their economies by transforming investments and economic policies. Over 50 countries have requested support from the partnership, including as part of the **UN framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19**.

2014



First UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) convened in Nairobi, Kenya

UNEA has become the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, with a universal membership of all 193 UN Member States. It also governs UNEP (see p.12).

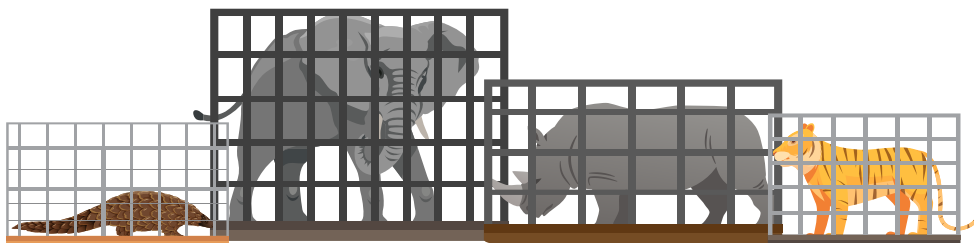
2016

UNEP unveiled the **Frontiers Report series**, scanning the horizon for environmental threats

In **2016**, **Frontiers** identified zoonotic diseases as an emerging issue of global concern, four years ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic. The **2018/2019** report addressed the threat posed by nitrogen pollution and informed discussions at the fourth UNEA, where Member States subsequently adopted a resolution on nitrogen management. The **2022** edition focuses on the emerging threats from wildfires, changing urban soundscapes and phenological shifts and mismatches.

UNEP stepped up work on illegal wildlife trade

UNEP's **Wild for Life campaign** works to end the illegal trade in wildlife products and engages with celebrities who speak up against the illegal trade in wildlife. The campaign has reached 1.5 billion people since 2016, received several awards and mobilized support from millions of individuals, businesses and governments to use their sphere of influence to help end this trade.



Global Peatlands Initiative established to safeguard ecosystems in peatlands

Peatlands provide valuable ecosystem services and are also one of the greatest allies in the fight against climate change. The **Global Peatlands Initiative** by UNEP and partners works to improve the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of peatlands.

2017

The AGRI3 Fund is born to unlock sustainable finance

UNEP is spearheading over US\$ 2 billion in new private and public investments through innovative finance facilities, such as the **AGRI3 Fund**, and the **Restoration Seed Capital Facility** to shift the investment behaviour across the entire finance industry and agri-food sector. The AGRI3 Fund was born out of a partnership between UNEP and Rabobank, seeking to unlock at least US\$ 1 billion in finance for deforestation-free, sustainable agriculture and land use.

2019

UNEP launches inaugural Environmental Rule of Law report

The first global assessment of its kind, **the report** offers a framework to address the gap between environmental laws and their application.



Video games for climate launched at UN Climate Action Summit

The Playing for the Planet Alliance of 30 video gaming companies with a combined reach of over 1.2 billion active users is working to embed green values and activations into their games in pursuit of net-zero goals. UNEP facilitates the Alliance with the support of GRID-Arendal and Playmob, with a goal of contributing to a 30 million-tonne reduction in CO2 emissions by 2030 with a reach of at least 110 million users.

Coalition for climate-friendly cooling established under UNEP leadership

The **Cool Coalition** provides countries and industry with tools to accelerate the global transition to efficient and climate-friendly cooling. UNEP used the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) as a platform to launch **Beating the Heat: A Sustainable Cooling Handbook for Cities** - a compendium for planners of proven options to help cool cities. UNEP's **Cooling Emissions and Policy Synthesis Report** produced together with the International Energy Agency (IEA) serves as an important guide to the role cooling can play in delivering on our climate commitments.



1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s



2020

UNEP rapidly shifts programming due to COVID-19

UNEP's response to COVID-19, **Working with the Environment to Protect People**, was delivered in May 2020 with a call to action to address threats to ecosystems and wildlife to prevent future outbreaks of zoonotic disease. In July of that year, UNEP and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) delivered recommendations for **Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission**. UNEP contributed to the UN system-wide **One Health** approach, highlighting the need to treat human, animal and planetary health as a single issue in policymaking. The widely shared **Waste Management during the COVID-19 Pandemic: from response to recovery** report was released in August.

Earth School kept students digitally connected to nature during the pandemic

In partnership with TED-Ed, UNEP launched **Earth School** in April 2020, providing free, high-quality educational content to help students, parents and teachers affected by COVID-19 lockdowns. The videos, reading materials and home-based activities were translated into more than 30 languages for students to learn about the environment and their roles within it. In the biggest online learning initiative in UNEP's history, nearly one million people have completed at least one full lesson on the free platform hosted by **TED-Ed**.

UNEP supports Member States to build back better

UNEP supports the **Global Recovery Observatory** database developed by the University of Oxford to track and record COVID-19-related government spending in the 89 largest economies – that includes recorded spending announcements exceeding US\$ 18 trillion. The Partnership for Action on Green Economy (see p.23) set up a support mechanism for a green economic recovery in its 20 partner states.

From acid rain to lead in petrol - supporting the fight against air pollution

Air pollution is the single greatest environmental threat to public health today and accounts for an estimated 7 million premature deaths each year.

In the Northern Hemisphere, focus on acid rain that was destroying forests, killing fish and putting entire ecosystems at risk culminated in 1979 in the **Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP)** representing the first legally binding instrument to address regional air quality. It has since dramatically helped reduce the amount of noxious chemicals, including sulphur and nitrogen oxide, hanging over cities. Together with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNEP played a key role in the development of the LRTAP.

Today, UNEP works closely with countries **to reduce air pollution** with stronger laws and regulations that tackle climate pollutants, improve fuel efficiency, minimize emissions from waste, monitor air quality, reduce vehicle emissions, support electric mobility and track sand and dust storms.

Some recent results include the **GEMS Air Pollution Monitoring platform** by UNEP and IQAir, which in 2020 alone was accessed by more than 50 million users that were seeking credible and complete real-time air quality data.

Also in 2020, UNEP's **Used Vehicles and the Environment Report** examined imports of used vehicles in 146 countries and the impact on climate and air quality issues of those imports. Minimum quality standards have been developed and collated by initiatives including the **Safer and Cleaner Used Vehicles for Africa project**.

In 2021 UNEP's first **global assessment of air pollution legislation** that examines national air quality legislation in 194 States and the European Union, was presented at the second **International Day of Clean Air for blue skies**, and has become a basis to call for more effective air pollution reduction.

Important progress on air pollution mitigation has also been achieved through the UNEP-administered **Climate and Clean Air Coalition** (see p.22).

A historic milestone; the end of lead in fuel after twenty-year campaign

After more than 20 years of advocacy and lobbying, the UNEP-led **Global Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles** scored a stunning environmental victory in achieving the end of leaded petrol worldwide in 2021, after it has contaminated air, dust, soil, water and crops for the better part of a century.

Banning the use of leaded petrol in transport, except fuel for small aircrafts, could prevent an estimated 1.2 million premature deaths per year, increase children's IQs, and save US\$ 2.45 trillion in healthcare expenses and other costs. Because lead exposure in childhood leads to behavioural problems, including violence in adulthood, the end of leaded fuel could also prevent some estimated 58 million crimes annually.

The work on phasing out lead continues through the **Lead Paint Alliance** formed by UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO).

» <https://tinyurl.com/ufp9hwjz>



2020

UN Secretary-General makes State of the Planet address

António Guterres delivers a **landmark speech** at Columbia University on the state of the planet, setting the stage to dramatically scale-up ambition on the environment. Guterres says humanity is waging war on the natural world and that “making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century”.

2021

UNEP offers a blueprint to tackle the triple planetary crisis

In response to the UNSG’s call for scaled-up action on the environment, UNEP releases **Making Peace with Nature**; a blueprint on how to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Launch of decade of restoration of planet’s ecosystems

World Environment Day 2021 marked the start of the UN **Decade on Ecosystems Restoration** (2021-2030), which aims to mobilize hundreds of millions of people to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on land and in oceans.

Efforts to reduce food waste accelerated

UNEP chaired the UN Task Force at the **Food Systems Summit**, where over 100 countries committed to national pathways for food system transformation. UNEP’s **Food Waste Index Report** found that people waste about 17 per cent of all food available for human consumption and that food waste is an issue in most countries, including middle- and lower-income countries.



2022

UNEA 5.2 is celebrated as the most successful to date

UNEA 5.2 **adopted 14 resolutions**, including to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee mandated to forge a legally binding agreement to **end plastic pollution**; and establishing a **Science-Policy Panel** on the sound management of chemicals and waste and preventing pollution. **The resolutions** also addressed the sound and sustainable management of chemicals and waste; sustainable nitrogen management; sustainable lake management; nature-based solutions for sustainable development; environmental aspects of minerals and metals management; biodiversity and health; sustainable and resilient infrastructure; enhancing circular economy; animal welfare; the environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery; the future of the Global Environment Outlook; and the principle of equitable geographical distribution.



UNEP@50 anniversary and Stockholm+50

UNEP@50 anniversary provided an opportunity to reflect on the past and envision the future, to reinvigorate international cooperation and spur collective action in line with the theme of strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. The **Political Declaration** acknowledged the 50-year contribution of UNEP in supporting a worldwide effort to overcome the planet’s biggest environmental challenges. The **Stockholm+50** gathering celebrated 50 years of global environmental action and also supported a number of legacy initiatives including a new **Action Plan for a Sustainable Planet in the Digital Age**.

2022

Landmark biodiversity framework adopted

Amidst a dangerous decline in biodiversity, threatening the survival of 1 million species and impacting the lives of billions of people, the landmark **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (GBF) aims to halt and reverse nature and biodiversity loss. It sets the world towards an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. The framework was adopted at the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), whose secretariat is hosted by UNEP.

2023

Global agreement on chemicals

The agreed **Global Framework on Chemicals** is a historic deal to protect people and the environment from chemical pollution, which causes an estimated 2 million deaths every year. The targets include a call for action on highly hazardous pesticides and a crackdown on illegal chemicals. UNEP will manage a dedicated trust fund in support of the framework.

New high seas agreement

UN Member States adopted a **historic agreement** designed to protect life in the 'high seas'. These areas beyond national jurisdictions cover two thirds of the planet's oceans and are increasingly under threat from pollution, climate change and overfishing. Among other things, the treaty will allow for the creation of marine protected areas – safe havens for fish, plants and other vulnerable species.

2024

UNEA 6: Bringing the world together

At the **United Nations Environment Assembly** (UNEA-6), **nations resolved** to rein in pollution from chemicals, to combat desertification and address sand and dust storms, to protect the ocean, to reduce air pollution, to better manage freshwater supplies, and to support the sustainable mining of energy transition minerals. With a record of 5,600-plus attendees, including 12 heads of state or government, the assembly demonstrated that countries can overcome geopolitical divisions to unite on environmental action.

Combatting desertification

UNEP supported the marshalling of US\$80 million in funding for Africa's Great Green Wall, an effort to increase the amount of arable land across 8,000 km of the Sahel, a semi-arid region that spans Africa. The projects from that funding are expected to cover more than 6.9 million hectares and benefit 5 million people. At the 16th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, nations launched the Riyadh Action Agenda, which saw US\$12 billion committed in loans and grants for land restoration and drought resilience initiatives.

