

Brussels, 24 May 2005

European Commission and UNEP co-operate to address global environmental threats

The European Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) met in Brussels to discuss cooperation in addressing threats to the environment. The High Level Meeting, co-chaired by Klaus Töpfer (Executive Director of UNEP) and Catherine Day (Director-General of DG Environment), took place in response to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the European Commission and UNEP in September 2004. The Memorandum reinforces policy dialogue and collaboration between the two institutions, supports implementation of the commitments made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and helps reach the environment-related UN Millennium Development Goals. The meeting agreed a Joint Work Programme designed to support these objectives.

Reflecting issues discussed at the meeting, Mr Klaus Töpfer stated: "Topics on our agenda today like the threat of climate change, management of dangerous chemicals, sustainable consumption and poverty alleviation are some of the most critical issues confronting policy-makers across Europe. Today's meeting was a major step towards realising the goals of the 2004 Memorandum that outlined a new way of doing business between our two institutions. Our practical co-operation to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development is now fully underway and I want to congratulate my Commission colleagues for their hard work and efforts to create a renewed spirit of cooperation and dialogue with UNEP."

For the Commission, Ms Catherine Day reflected: "Our practical co-operation to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development is underway - supported by policy dialogue, joint actions and shared awareness-raising activities. I welcome the Joint Work Programme initiated today. This summarises ongoing activity and sets out concrete steps we will take over the next year to realise the goals set in September 2004."

Practical Co-operation

UNEP is the main UN body in the field of the environment, and the Commission and UNEP already enjoy good cooperation. This first High Level Meeting under the structured framework created by the 2004 Memorandum covered a broad range of questions; it aimed to identify specific issues on which further co-operation could focus. Klaus Töpfer introduced discussion by presenting the state of play in major multilateral issues, including climate change and trade and the environment. Given the coming Millennium Review Summit and the need to improve international environmental governance, both sides also discussed the desirability of upgrading UNEP into a specialised UN Environment Organisation. Further detailed discussions followed on chemicals, post-tsunami reconstruction, regional seas and sustainable production and consumption.

With an eye to future practical work, the 2005-2006 work programme covering collaboration in areas such as chemicals, biodiversity and sustainable consumption and production was reviewed. By combining policy co-ordination and practical co-operation both sides aim to reinforce their effectiveness in achieving common goals in protecting the environment.