

# Achim Steiner

**A**cting on the nomination of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the UN General Assembly unanimously elected **Achim Steiner** as the **Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** on 16 March 2006 for a four-year term, effective 15 June 2006. Mr. Steiner is the fifth Executive Director in UNEP's history.

Before joining UNEP, Mr. Steiner served as Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) from 2001 to 2006.

His professional career has included assignments with governmental, non-governmental and international organizations in different parts of the world. In Washington, where he was Senior Policy Advisor of IUCN's Global Policy Unit, he led the development of new partnerships between the environment community, the World Bank and the United Nations system. In Southeast Asia he worked as Chief Technical Advisor on a programme for the sustainable management of Mekong River watersheds and community-based natural resources management. In 1998 he was appointed Secretary-General of the World Commission on Dams, based in South Africa, where he managed a global programme of work to bring together the public sector, civil society and the private sector in a global policy process on dams and development.

He worked both at the grassroots level and at the highest levels of international policy making to address the interface between environmental sustainability, social equity and economic development.



Mr. Steiner, a German national, was born in Brazil in 1961, where he lived for 10 years. His educational background includes a BA from the University of Oxford as well as an MA from the University of London, with specialization in development economics, regional planning, and international development and environment policy. He also studied at the German Development Institute in Berlin and at the Harvard Business School.

Mr. Steiner serves on a number of international advisory boards, including the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED).

**ISO Focus:** Can you describe how UNEP is addressing climate change and how its Finance Initiative will make a difference?

**Achim Steiner:** We are addressing climate change through a new strategy. One that builds on three decades of scientific and policy work and which, through bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – established and supported by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization – has put the risks and opportunities on the world stage. Part of this strategy includes a new Climate Neutral Network to be launched at the UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Monaco at the end of February 2008. Our Climate Neutral Network provides online support for the sharing of experience and good practices. It involves a network of countries, cities, companies and others who are bold enough to commit to climate neutrality.

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As part of our work with the private sector, we are also engaging business through initiatives, such as the UN Global Compact and UNEP Finance Initiative (FI). The Caring for Climate platform, launched by the UN Global Compact, UNEP and World Business Council for Sustainable Development in July 2007, challenges corporations to address climate at the strategy level. Signatories

to its statement are expected to report progress in 2008.

Insurers and reinsurers in UNEP FI were very engaged in the climate change process since the 1990s. As of 2000, they have been joined by banking and asset management members. UNEP FI's Climate Change Working Group has represented financial services at each climate negotiation since 2001. The key role for this group is to bring the perspective of the broad financial services community to the inter-governmental process. They also build awareness amongst policy-makers of the role for the finance sector in identifying, mitigating, and managing the financial and capital market risks associated with global warming.

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Along with this goes promoting awareness of the financing and investment opportunities associated with climate-friendly ideas, technologies, companies and markets. Already in 2002, a UNEP FI report projected that annual

global economic losses from climate and other natural disasters would reach USD 150 billion by 2012. The figure was passed in 2005. In many ways, UNEP FI's work woke up the policy community to risks that the financial

and capital market systems face due to climate change.

At the recent meeting in Bali, UNEP FI presented its latest report, “Carbon Crunch: Meeting the Cost”, providing an update on the original 2002



*Mr. Achim Steiner and Prof. Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, at the launch of UNEP's Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign in Nairobi, Kenya.*

*Mr. Steiner addresses school children at MCEDO Beijing School in Mathare, a poor neighbourhood in Nairobi.*



work. There are very clear messages in that document for both policy-makers and the financial sector itself concerning the benefits of early action and the potentially devastating economic costs of a slow response or business-as-usual inaction.

*ISO Focus: ISO 14001, which celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has become the international benchmark for environmental management system (EMS), implemented in 138 countries and now thoroughly integrated with the global economy. Can you say how the standard's worldwide success – whose portfolio includes such topics as environmental auditing, environmental labelling and environmental communications – contributes to protecting and preserving the environment? To what extent would you encourage and support its broader implementation?*

## Guest View

**Achim Steiner:** UNEP has always encouraged voluntary action by business to complement regulation and deal with environmental issues in a more pro-active manner. This includes the use of voluntary standards and codes. The growth in uptake of ISO 14001 and use of the ISO 14000 series since the late 1990s have therefore been a welcome development. Its recognition and uptake in Asia has been particularly impressive.

Mindful of the expansion of the 14000 series, UNEP intends to sign a cooperation agreement with ISO to ensure complementarity between its emerging environmental standards and environmental norms promoted by UNEP as intergovernmental custodian for the global environment, standards and agreements. ISO 14001 and its related standards enable business to put basic systems in place, foundations without which more ambitious environmental performance measures will struggle to get off the ground.

At the same time, we need to recognize that a basic process standard as common denominator is not enough. Management in all organizations needs to look seriously at further building blocks towards environmental performance, and continual improvement in such performance. This means, for example, that requirements for reporting on progress against indicators such as those found in the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Guidelines need to be addressed more forcefully. It also implies regular and multistakeholder revision to ensure that we effectively promote new innovations in matters, such as eco-labelling and lifecycle management. We also need to continually improve capacity building to help smaller companies and industry in developing countries introduce new ISO standards.

I therefore applaud the role of standardization as a means to communicate basic expectations and facilitate greater performance innovation and free trade in the global economy. Standardization provides a floor, but one must caution against using it as a ceiling, since our ultimate objective must be to agree on measurable and verifiable targets for significant environmental improvements.



Conference area in UNEP's Nairobi headquarters.

**ISO Focus:** *How do you expect ISO 14064 and ISO 14065 standards for assessing, supporting and verifying greenhouse gas reduction and emissions to contribute to the development of emission trading, and what are your expectations on the development of this market? How will these standards prove useful in the context of the UNEP Finance Initiative and the WBCSD/WRI Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which has just been consolidated by a Memorandum of Understanding with ISO? How do you see developing countries benefiting, especially larger emerging countries like China, India or Brazil?*

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**Achim Steiner:** The emissions trading market, just like any other market in an early development stage, needs information, data and full disclosure to enable a realistic price to be set. ISO 14064

and ISO 14065 can play a role in ensuring transparency and verifiable information around emissions reductions that market actors can learn to trust and act upon. Once a realistic price signal is established and various market players learn to understand the fluctuations of the market, you will see greater liquidity and a higher volume of trading.

We know the current global carbon market stands at about USD 30 billion, of which the European emission trading scheme represents a very significant component – perhaps as high as USD 25 billion. Some observers believe this carbon market could double by 2012. The positive result of the Bali meeting, notably the roadmap, will certainly encourage the market that uncertainty is being reduced. Again, ISO standards can become an important part of the information flow and data architecture that ensure sound foundations for a new market.

Whether it's the financial institutions involved in UNEP FI or the companies supporting the WBCSD/WRI initiatives, the value of reliable information is what makes the market work effectively. The large developing world markets will benefit enormously as our ability to assess, quantify, monitor and verify carbon markets develop. Any market that works and sets a realistic price will be based on trust. ISO standards can contribute in a very significant manner to deepening that trust around the market.

**ISO Focus:** *A common position paper, “International Standards to develop and promote energy efficiency and renewable energy sources”, has been issued recently by the International Energy Agency (IEA) and ISO and circulated in various contexts, including the preparatory phase of the G8 Summit. What are your thoughts on this initiative? If done sustainably, do you support biofuels as a significant step toward slowing or stopping global climate change? Does the subject possibly necessitate the development of International Standards?*



Aerial view of UNEP's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Achim Steiner:** Participants at UNEP's Business and Industry Global Dialogue '07 in São Paulo noted that renewables offer countries such as Brazil new export opportunities, not only for technology but also for advisory services, expertise and know-how. At the meeting, the oil and gas industry expressed interest in working with UNEP on international standards for the production of sustainable biofuels. Clearly, this is a very topical issue on which we would welcome a dialogue with the ISO community as well.

In order to address a fast growing bioenergy market and the potential environmental and social risks involved, the need for sustainability criteria and sustainability assurance systems is widely recognized. With respect to fuel quality, it has been recognized that fuel specifications are required. The EU and the US, for example, have developed their own biodiesel standards. International cooperation leading to a common set of standards would facilitate international trade. Biofuels as such offer important opportunities to address climate change, energy security and sustainable development generally. However, if not planned and managed properly, the potential benefits will not materialize and other environmental or social pressures will be created. Guidelines that would allow solid decision-making on crops and pathways, as well as help implement sustainable production of biofuels, are required. UNEP is therefore working with the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels on such guidelines.

**ISO Focus:** ISO's International Standards on the whole constitute a toolbox for the environmental integrity of the planet,

*economic growth and societal equity – in other words, for all three dimensions of sustainable development. What added value would you see in the International Standard giving guidelines on social responsibility being developed by ISO (cf. ISO 26000), in which UNEP is actively participating? How do you see it being used?*

**Achim Steiner:** Sustainable development requires us to improve our ability to integrate. The complex world out there is also an integrated one. This has implications for established management tools and standards that have been applied in an uncoordinated manner, and behind them organizational departments and expert communities that have been operating in isolation from each other.

Whilst reminding us of the close interrelation between business operations and the societal context within which companies operate, the corporate social responsibility debate of the last 10 years has in many respects been driven by this need to integrate better. It also

means that ISO has to improve its ability to ensure complementarity between the "soft technology" or management standards developed by its expert communities. In addition, aligning ISO standards with international expectations related to sustainable development needs to go hand in hand with a more participatory approach in standards development.

I therefore welcome the indication that the ISO 26000 process has managed to display a more open, multistakeholder process with increasing participation from the developing world. I also have high expectations as to the ability of ISO 26000 to help introduce organizations worldwide to what fundamentally we expect when we say "social responsibility".

Key for UNEP has always been to ensure that "SR" includes the environmental pillar, and that environmental responsibility is given its due place. Environmental care goes hand in hand with societal care. Sustainable consumption and production is closely interrelated with poverty. Environmental standards go hand in hand with good working conditions, health and safety. ISO 26000 can help facilitate this integration.

UNEP also hopes to see an ISO 26000 that includes the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact. These are key building blocks, taken from UN conventions and intergovernmental declarations such as the 1992 Rio Declaration. I do hope that pro-active businesses and other stakeholder organizations will help ensure a balanced, progressive and timely text. ■

UNEP has prepared a diversity of publications to help protect the environment.

