PRESS RELEASE:

UNEP and UN-Habitat Partner to Promote Greener Cities

Medellin, Colombia, 8 April 2014 – With half the world's population living in urban areas – a number that is estimated to grow to 70 per cent by 2050 – the importance of creating greener, more resilient cities and facilitating a better quality of life for urban dwellers is rapidly gaining prominence on the international agenda.

A new partnership launched today at the World Urban Forum, between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), aims to mainstream the environmental perspective into urban policy-making, while incorporating urban perspectives into environmental policies.

The "Greener Cities Partnership" will focus largely on three areas: building resilient, resource-efficient cities; achieving sustainable transport and mobility; and establishing effective waste and waste water management. UNEP and UN-Habitat will provide core staff time and seed funding to implement joint activities in these areas.

The Partnership initially covers the period 2014-2016 leading up to the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016, but is expected to continue beyond that date.

"Environmental sustainability is an important aspect of sustainable development," said Joan Clos, UN Under-Secretary-General Executive Director of UN-Habitat. "Cities are not only victims of the effects of climate change, but the way in which we plan and build them can have a huge impact on their resilience and resource-efficiency. This partnership will enhance our understanding of that relationship."

Cities have historically constituted efficient settlement patterns because of the correlation between higher density and lower per-capita rates of resource use and emissions. Today, they accommodate about 50 per cent of the world's population – an estimated 3.5 billion people – on just 3 per cent of the Earth's surface.

This concentration of wealth, resources and shared infrastructure offers the potential to make cities both highly resource-efficient and resilient to external pressures such as socio-economic shocks.

Urban growth, however, is trending in the opposite direction. By some estimates, urban areas now consume 75 per cent of the planet's natural resources and produce 60 per cent of its greenhouse gas emissions and half of its waste. Sprawling development is destroying the very natural capital that would provide resilience to brace against resource scarcity and climate change, especially for the poorest.

Settlement patterns are not only important for their impact on energy use and emissions, but also for the consumption of land itself. Essential for ecosystem services such as carbon capture, nutrient recycling and

food provision, land is also under short supply. When cities expand in a spontaneous, unplanned manner, much of this land is lost.

"Ensuring that future urban growth does not result in further environmental degradation represents one of the biggest development challenges today," said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

"The Greener Cities Partnership will generate a better understanding of how resource efficiency impacts the resilience of cities, and will aim to build political support for the establishment of an innovative initiative for resilient, resource-efficient cities," he added.

In the area of sustainable transport and mobility, the Greener Cities Partnership will build on previous collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNEP – in partnership with the World Bank and the UN Centre for Regional Development – to promote bus rapid transport and non-motorized transport facilities in Africa.

African countries are often considered to be low-greenhouse gas emitters, but in the not-too-distant future the continent's transport sector will be a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. African cities are expanding at unprecedented rates and are facing rapid population growth, higher motorization rates, rapidly worsening traffic congestion, as well as a resulting increase in health problems associated with traffic pollution.

With a focus on Kenya, the Greener Cities Partnership will seek to contribute to the transport component of the country's climate strategy. It will also work to establish a forum for promoting sustainable transport and support the development of an action plan for sustainable transport across the African continent.

On waste and waste water, the Partnership's work will build on several joint and individual initiatives by UN-Habitat and UNEP. These include the Global Partnership on Waste Management – an open-ended partnership for international organizations, governments, businesses and others which was launched by UNEP in 2010 – and the UN-Task Force on Wastewater and Global Wastewater Initiative, which is co-chaired by the two agencies.

By 2025, the world's cities will be generating about 2.2 billion tonnes of solid waste per year. Waste generation will be more than double in lower income countries, according to the World Bank. Contaminated water, due to inadequate wastewater management, is a major threat to public health in cities.

The Greener Cities Partnership will aim to implement integrated waste management strategies in at least 10 selected cities by 2016.

For more information, please visit: http://unhabitat.org/wuf

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