



# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement      Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente

Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде      برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

联合国环境规划署



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Dear Mr. Nikolayevich,

Thank you for the invitation extended to me and UNEP to address the First International Arctic Forum "Living Planet". Regrettably, due to a series of earlier planned commitments on these dates, I will not be able to join you at the Forum. At the same time, allow me to share a few reflections from UNEP's perspective.

A healthy Arctic environment provides essential local, regional and global benefits. The world's climate is moderated by the Arctic cold. Polar sea ice and the adjacent snow cover on land reflect a significant amount of solar radiation back into space, which cools the planet. Arctic living resources are essential parts of indigenous peoples' diets and way of life, and are part of the local and regional ecosystems. The remarkable natural beauty of the Arctic region makes it a major tourist destination across many countries. The Arctic's indigenous people have a unique culture and heritage, and contribute valuable knowledge related to the Arctic's natural environment. Effective management and protection of the Arctic and its resources are essential to ensure the continuation of these benefits for the whole of humanity.

The Arctic is experiencing a profound transformation that will have important impacts on the region and the world as a whole. Driven largely by interacting forces of climate change and increasing human activities, the Arctic region is rapidly changing. Since 1980, warming in the Arctic has increased at twice the global average.

Arctic ecological zones are already beginning to shift; thawing of the ground is disruptive to transportation, buildings and other infrastructure; indigenous human communities are likewise facing major economic and cultural changes, and are impacted by contaminants transported from other regions. Many coastal communities and facilities face increased exposure to shoreline erosion and storms. Warming soils and water will release methane and other gases that will further exacerbate global warming.

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The drivers of these changes come from both inside and outside the Arctic, and their consequences will have regional and world-wide impacts. Melting land ice, glaciers and ice sheets, particularly on Greenland, will contribute to global sea level rise. The warming Arctic may threaten to alter global weather patterns and ocean circulation. Habitats, food supplies and migratory routes of a significant number of migratory birds, marine animals and other species, for which the Arctic provides an essential habitat, are being disrupted. In order to effectively address these regional and global impacts, actions from both within and outside the Arctic region will be required.

The harsh impacts of climate change pose an imminent danger to lives and development efforts everywhere across the developed and developing world. According to UNEP's 2014 Emissions Gap Report, in order to limit global temperature rise to 2°C and limit the worst impacts of climate change, global carbon neutrality should be attained by mid-to-late century. Reducing the global temperature rise to less than 2°C will require drastic reductions in the use of fossil fuels globally and finding more efficient sources of energy. The imperative of bringing greenhouse gas emissions to zero by the end of the century is not only possible, but it may also be profitable to many countries and companies.

By all accounts, 2015 is a crucial year for global and regional action on the environment and sustainable development. A few months from now, the world will adopt a Post-2015 Development Agenda and a set of Sustainable Development Goals that will define a path for the next generation of development. December will witness the convening of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21, the objective of which is the conclusion of a legally binding and universal agreement on climate change. The coming months will define development priorities in the world as well as in the Arctic, and the articulation and reflection of common positions on climate change, in the context of global negotiations.

I wish you fruitful discussions during these two days and hope that, together, we can achieve practical results for the future welfare, prosperity, and sustainable development of the Arctic and its people. We would also appreciate receiving the report on the proceedings of this Forum.

Yours sincerely,

Achim Steiner  
Executive Director

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