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Ahead of International Mother Earth Day, UN officials highlight global concerns



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Mark Garten

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Ahead of [International Mother Earth Day](#) on Sunday, senior United Nations officials today drew attention to global issues affecting the planet.

In a [message](#) to mark the occasion, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon said the annual observance honours “our one and only planet and the place of human beings in it,” adding that the Day is also meant as a call to action against human disregard for nature’s life-supporting resources and ecosystems.

In 2009, the General Assembly proclaimed 22 April as International Mother Earth Day, expressing its conviction that, to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, “it is necessary to promote harmony with nature and the Earth.”

Pointing to the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as ([Rio+20](#)), taking place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June, Mr. Ban said that the event offers a timely chance for a much-needed paradigm shift.

“In the next twenty years, the world will need at least 50 per cent more food, 45 per cent more energy, 30 per cent more water and many millions of new jobs,” Mr. Ban said. “Our challenge at Rio+20 and beyond is to take a holistic, integrated approach to these linked challenges – driving at the interrelations such that solutions to one problem translate into progress on all.”

Rio+20 marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, also held in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg. World leaders, along with thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other groups, will come together to shape how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection on an increasingly crowded planet.

“We must use Rio+20 to promote better respect for nature and to cultivate an environment – natural and social – in which all children feel safe and all people can prosper,” the UN chief said in his message. “Mother Earth belongs to us all; Rio+20 is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that all of us must seize.”

In a [joint message](#) for International Mother Earth Day, the Executive Directors of the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and [UN Women](#), Ertharin Cousin and Michelle Bachelet, respectively, dedicated the Day to “the young girls who spend a full day in search of firewood, to the mothers who sell food rations to buy fuel for their family, and to the countless women who are forced to skip meals because wood is not available or unaffordable to cook their food.”

They noted that far too many refugees and women living in drought conditions are forced to walk into the bush to collect firewood, venturing into unsafe areas and are left vulnerable to rape and other attacks. In addition, they chop down trees and uproot grasses, harming the fragile ecosystem.

“Wood fuel consumption for cooking and basic household needs has become a major contributor to rapid deforestation and environmental degradation. Stripping land jeopardizes agriculture and contributes to the loss of valuable carbon sinks,” Ms. Cousins and Ms. Bachelet said. “And indoor air pollution from burning solid fuel is one of the top ten global health risks according to the World Health Organization.”

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