



UN embarks on low-carbon future by detailing its own emissions



15 December 2009 – As one of its first steps towards reducing its greenhouse gas footprint, the United Nations – after one of the most wide-ranging and painstaking exercises in its history – announced today that it emits 1.7 million tons of carbon dioxide annually worldwide.

That amount, more than half of which is generated by peacekeeping operations, represents just 3.3 per cent of emissions generated by New York City, the host city of the UN's headquarters.

"This first-ever inventory is just a stepping stone towards supporting the kind of goals that scientists deem necessary to combat climate change while realizing a low-carbon UN as part of a transition to a 21st century resource-efficient international body," said Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**).

The results are part of a new report, in response to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's determination to make the UN system climate-friendly, launched today in Copenhagen, Denmark, where nations are holding talks on an ambitious new climate change agreement.

The publication uses a common approach and methodology to break down emissions by the 200,000-person strong world body, from the Secretariat to specialized agencies to field operations.

Air travel is the main culprit in releasing greenhouse gases, accounting for roughly half of the emissions produced by the UN, it found.

The world body's headquarters in New York, built in 1952, is due for a full renovation which is under way. All major building systems are set to be upgraded, with a 50 per cent drop in total energy use expected.

At the UN office in Nairobi and the base of UNEP, a new 1,200-person zero-emission office is being erected.

Agencies and programmes, including the International Labour Organization (**ILO**) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**), are also implementing measures to reduce their carbon footprint, such as increasing the use of video conferencing and pilot hybrid-electric vehicles.

Another UNEP-backed report issued today spotlights the damage wrought by climate change on Viet Nam's Mekong and Red River Deltas, two key agricultural areas and home to more than 40 per cent of the South-East Asian nation's population of nearly 40 million.

"More than one third of the Mekong Delta, where 17 million people live and nearly half the country's rice is grown, could be submerged if sea levels rise by one metre," said Young Woo Park, UNEP's Regional Director for the Asia-Pacific Region.

Viet Nam is one of the countries expected to bear the greatest brunt of global warming. In the past 50 years, it has experienced temperature surges of up to 0.2 degrees centigrade per decade, but rainfall patterns have also shifted, with precipitation levels having risen in the north and dropped in the south. Sea level rises of between 2 and 4 centimetres have been recorded every decade.

According to the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**), Viet Nam will lose over 12 per cent of its land if sea levels rise 1 metre, while a 2-metre rise would result in up to 16 per cent land loss.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

Oceans acidifying rapidly due to carbon dioxide emissions, says UN-backed study