

United Nations



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1 July 2009

Dear Achim,

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, I would like to express my appreciation for our successful collaboration during this period.

All disasters have environmental impacts, which need to be identified and addressed for humanitarian assistance to be effective. In recognition of this fact, and at the request of Member States, the Joint Environment Unit was established on 1 July 1994, as an innovative partnership between our two organizations to coordinate and mobilize the international response to environmental emergencies.

Since its inception, the Joint Environment Unit has responded successfully to a wide range of environmental emergencies around the globe, including industrial and technological accidents, chemical and oil spills, forest fires and secondary impacts of natural disasters. As a result, for the past 15 years, countries facing environmental emergencies and natural disasters have greatly benefited from our joint assistance at times when they needed it most. Together with UNEP and other partners, it has also provided diverse capacity building and training services to countries. I am delighted that the Joint Environment Unit has been a practical, value-added partnership mechanism of OCHA and UNEP.

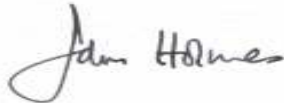
The importance of environmental issues in humanitarian assistance is better-recognized now than at any previous point in time. I trust that this interest and moment will continue to grow, particularly in the face of global challenges like climate change. But increased understanding and recognition of the environmental role in humanitarian action inevitably lead to higher expectations. We must therefore work to improve the global environmental emergency response regime – for example, through greater awareness, greater capacity, more partnerships and learning the lessons from past emergencies.

I take this opportunity to thank you for committing your experts and resources, through the Joint Environment Unit. In this regard, I am pleased that the recent inaugural edition of the Green Star Awards, which was co-organized by our two agencies as well as Green Cross International, brought well-deserved attention to the need for preparing for, and responding to, environmental emergencies.

Mr. Achim Steiner
Executive Director
UNEP
Nairobi

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude for your support over the years, and emphasize that now, more than ever, that support is vital to the environmental, humanitarian and development communities, and in particular to countries affected by disasters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Holmes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Holmes
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator