

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE PRESERVATION
OF THE OZONE LAYER**

16 September 2008

Market turmoil, economic downturns and talk of recession have historically spelt tough times for the environment. At such moments, safeguarding the planet has often been seen as a luxury, and as a burden on economic recovery and development. But the remarkable story of the ozone layer, whose preservation we celebrate today, shows such thinking for what it is: mere myth.

Decisive multilateral action on environmental threats and challenges can bring wide-ranging health, social and economic benefits. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which underpins our efforts to combat depletion of the earth's fragile protective shield, also contributes to combating climate change, since many of the chemicals controlled under the treaty have also emerged as ones that contribute to global warming. By phasing out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) -- once common in products such as refrigerators -- and now deciding to accelerate a freeze and phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), the treaty has provided two benefits at once. I hope Governments will look at such results and feel empowered to act across a wide range of environmental challenges, and not only in prosperous times. Such action should include exploring more fully the natural synergies that can occur among our various multilateral environmental agreements.

Next year in Copenhagen, Governments will gather for a crucial meeting on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Our goal must be a decisive new agreement that sets the world on track to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and that provides the funding needed for vulnerable countries to adapt to the impact of climate change. Such an agreement would not only represent progress on one of the greatest challenges of our time, but is also likely to help tackle urban air pollution, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity and other dangers.

After decades of chemical attack, it may take another 50 years or so for the ozone layer to recover fully. As the Montreal Protocol has taught us, when we degrade our environment too far, nursing it back to health tends to be a long journey, not a quick fix. But the overarching lesson of the Protocol is that by acting on one challenge, we also act on many others. Continued progress, and the possibility of new breakthroughs from Copenhagen and other fora, would also make significant contributions to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. On this International Day, let us pledge to seize more such multi-faceted opportunities, and do our utmost to create tomorrow's "green economy" today.