

Delegates praise UNEP's leadership role and achievement in Environmental Diplomacy

The High Level Environmental Diplomacy Seminar was organized by the UNEP Addis Ababa Liaison Office in collaboration with the African Union Commission and the UN Economic Commission for Africa. The event was attended by 180 participants, among others, the diplomats and representatives of over 20 African Countries, delegations of various European and North American countries, and high level representatives of UN agencies. The event brought together some of the most eminent voices in the field of environmental protection and sustainability along with renowned experts and prominent diplomats, thereby providing participants with unique insights into the complex and highly important realities of the current environmental challenges and the roles of diplomats in ensuring that the objectives of sustainable development are realized. The seminar focused on topical debates surrounding Climate Change, Biodiversity and the way forward in International Environmental Governance, 20 years following the Rio Declaration and 40 years after the establishment of UNEP.

Mr. Mounkaila Goumandakoye, Director of the UNEP Regional Office, made his welcome remarks followed by the statements from Mr. Eugene Owusu, UNDP Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Ethiopia; Ms. Jennifer Kargbo, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECA; and H.E. Dr. Monica K. Juma, Ambassador of Kenya to Ethiopia and Chairperson of the African Union Peace and Security Council, who respectively spoke on environmental diplomacy from the development, peace and security, and socio-economic perspectives. H.E. Mrs. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission highlighted on the ongoing efforts that are underway in Africa, and the commendable work of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in strengthening the common position of Africa in key international environmental negotiations including climate change.

In line with UNEP's mandates and responsibilities of supporting the effective participation of countries in multilateral environmental negotiations, the key note address of Mr. Achim Steiner UNEP, the Executive Director focused on the challenges and opportunities for Africa in setting the agenda of these negotiations. As a special guest of the seminar, President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana, made a motivating speech on environmental diplomacy based on the experiences his country at the international negotiations on climate change. The opening segment of the seminar was concluded with the interactive session that was facilitated by the Director of UNEP-ROA.

H.E. Commissioner Tumusiime made a general remark that gave the perspective and set the context for the panel that was held in the afternoon. H.E. Mrs. Isabel Cristina da Azevedo Heyvaert, Ambassador of Brazil to Ethiopia and H.E. Mr. Hector Valezzi, the Ambassador of Mexico to Ethiopia Republic of Mexico, respectively made their keynote speech on the upcoming negotiations in Rio and in Cancun. The keynotes of H.E. Henri Djombo, Minister of Sustainable Development, Forest Economy and Environment of the Republic of Congo

and Amassador Macharia Kamau, Kenya's Permanent Representative to UNEP and UN-Habitat, brought into context the perspective of the South and Africa with regards to the eminent and complex challenges faced in environmental diplomacy and the strategic direction that needs to be taken, while in their remarks H.E. Jean Louis Borloo, State Minister of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and the Sea of France; and H.E. Brice Lalonde, Ambassador of France in charge of international negotiations on climate change, gave emphasis to the perspective of the North. Following the keynote addresses of the high level panelists an interactive session was facilitated and moderated by Madelene Mukamabano, journalist of radiofrance-internationale (RFI). The participants actively involved during the interactive session.

Mr. Steiner made the closing remarks highlighting on the significance of environmental diplomacy seminar and the need for Africa to set the agenda.
