

# Foreword

Achim Steiner



Human migration, forced or otherwise, will undoubtedly be one of the most significant consequences of environmental degradation and climate change in decades to come. Many experts argue that large numbers of people are already on the move, with millions more expected to follow as evidence of climate change mounts.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and UNEP's Global Environment Outlook have recently

delivered sobering assessments of the physical and environmental impacts of climate change. For example, sea-level rise and unsustainable human development are contributing to the loss of coastal wetlands and mangroves and increased damage from coastal flooding. Millions of people are projected to be flooded annually by the 2080s due to sea-level rise. Densely-populated and low-lying areas where adaptive capacity is relatively low and which already face other challenges, such as tropical storms, are especially at risk.

Current knowledge about the social consequences we should expect from these processes is still quite

sparse. Targeted research and assessment are of course essential to achieve a better understanding of the issue but we cannot afford to wait. It is critical that we start immediately to translate existing knowledge into humanitarian policies and practices.

In this context, UNEP, the International Organization for Migration, the UN University and other international organisations have formed the Migration and Environment Alliance. This Alliance will provide a forum and catalyst for new projects and ideas related to environment-driven migration to advance an integrated and coordinated approach to this challenging cross-sectoral issue.

Sound environmental management and climate change adaptation can help mitigate the causes of migration. Equally, early action and planning mean that the environmental migration processes already under way can be better managed.

*Achim Steiner is UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)). For further information, please contact Andrew Morton at [andrew.morton@unep.org](mailto:andrew.morton@unep.org)*