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# UNEP launches State of Environment report for South Asian policy makers

Colombo, Bangkok, January 21 - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) today launched state of the environment reports for South Asia: one targeting policy makers and the other written by youth.

The South Asia State of the Environment Report identifies five key environmental issues: livelihood security, environmental disasters, industrialisation, urbanisation and biodiversity loss.

It shows the region suffering from excessive land degradation, desertification, and habitat fragmentation, depleting the wide variety of forest products that are an important source of food, medicine and income for indigenous people.

Urbanisation and poverty is a key challenge in cities, with freshwater supply problems being compounded by high pop-

ulation growth rate.

As South Asia's economies have restructured towards industrialisation, energy demand has risen fast, with dependence on coal for electricity production causing air pollution problems.

Institutions and policy makers must do more to integrate environmental and socio-economic factors into decision-making and to ensure trade liberalisation does not compromise the environment and erode natural resources, the report concludes.

UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer said the State of the Environment (SOE) report was designed to "provide concrete guidance for action planning, policy setting and resource allocation for policy makers and institutions in the region."

Its release comes just a fortnight before UNEP's 22nd Governing Council meeting and Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Nairobi, which will deal with an ambitious agenda of issues drawn from the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and 60 days before the UNEP-led World Water Day on March 22, which will focus attention on the many responses to water management issues being made around the globe.

In his forward to "Children of the Monsoon: South Asia State of the Environment 2002. The Youth Version", Klaus Toepfer says, "every person can make a difference, and collectively we can make a big difference. It is up to you and your community to

make choices and take actions. South Asia is a region that is economically poor and at the same time is also extremely rich in resources. The ancient culture, history, traditions and vast knowledge base have given its people a distinct edge in finding the solutions we are all looking for."

The youth version was written by members of youth organisations which make up the South Asia Youth Environment Network (SAYEN), established by UNEP in Kathmandu in June 2002 (see contacts for lead authors below).

Surendra Shrestha, Director of the UNEP Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific, speaking at the launch of the reports in Colombo today, acknowledged Development Alternatives of India, the Collaborating Centre for preparation of the SOE Report, and the support of the Sri Lanka-based South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACAP).

He said the report had drawn from the recently-published national SOE reports for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Iran, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and had contributed to UNEP's flagship Global Environmental Outlook 3 Report.

The launch of the publications was made during the Special Session of the Governing Council of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, which concludes today in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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