

UN Oceans Conference Opens on World Environment Day

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NEW YORK, New York, June 5, 2017 (ENS) – “This is our environment. It is the keystone of a sustainable future. Without a healthy environment we cannot end poverty or build prosperity,” said Secretary-General António Guterres today in a video message for World Environment Day, celebrated annually on June 5.

The UN chief reaffirmed that everyone has a role to play “in protecting our only home,” including using less plastics, driving less, wasting less food and “teaching each other to care.”

“On World Environment Day, and every day, let us reconnect with nature. Let us cherish the planet that protects us,” said Guterres.

In 1972, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated June 5 as World Environment Day, the largest global day for positive environmental action. This year, the main celebrations are hosted by Canada, which is also celebrating its 150th anniversary.

“I am proud and excited that Canada is hosting World Environment Day this year. I encourage all Canadians to join the celebrations, to connect with nature, and recommit to leaving a healthier environment for future generations,” said Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Erik Solheim, executive director, United Nations Environment Programme, said, “We are honored and grateful to celebrate the 2017 World Environment Day in a place as beautiful as Canada. This year, we are asking people to show how much nature means to them and to share their experiences with others around the world. Luckily for those in Canada, there is no shortage of stunning scenery for people to get outdoors and reconnect with nature.”

“Our entire modern life, with its skyscrapers and smartphones, stands on a delicate foundation of natural systems,” said Solheim. “Today, these foundations are shaking, undermined by man-made climate change, deforestation and extinctions. No amount of advanced technology will save us if we destroy and pollute our natural lifeblood.”

Solheim says thousands of people across six continents are joining massive clean-ups of beaches and parks, countries are protecting 1,600 square kilometres of land, and over 30 iconic landmarks, including the Empire State Building, the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, and Niagara Falls, will light up in green.

The 2017 edition of World Environment Day coincides with the opening at UN Headquarters in New York of the five-day Ocean Conference, the first high-level global meeting on conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. The governments of Fiji and Sweden have the co-hosting responsibilities of the Conference.

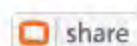
The 2030 Agenda resolves “to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources,” in particular, the Agenda’s associated Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 15 focus on respectively conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources and on protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of land ecosystems.

A surge in the number of voluntary commitments to take action to improve the health of the ocean by countries, businesses and civil society groups has been recorded, and more are expected as the Ocean Conference gets underway Monday, 5 June at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The commitments, now numbering over 600 and still increasing, come as heads of state and government and ministers will join ocean leaders, experts, businesses, and civil society organizations to discuss solutions that restore the health of the world’s ocean. The commitments target a wide range of ocean problems, ranging from protecting coral reefs, strengthening sustainable fisheries, reducing plastic pollution, and addressing the impacts of climate change on the ocean.

“The Ocean Conference is where we truly begin the process of reversing the cycle of decline into which our accumulated activities have placed the Ocean,” said Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly. “By adding to the conference’s register of voluntary commitments; of producing practical solutions to Ocean’s problems at the Partnership Dialogues; and through the affirmation of the conference’s Call for Action, we have begun that process of reversing the wrongs.”

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