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## Environment: Healthy Planet, Healthy People

*All 7 billion of us, and those who will follow, depend on the health of our planet.*

The paramount challenge of this century is to meet the needs of 7 billion human beings now – and the billions to come – while protecting the intricate balance of nature that sustains life.

Demands for water, trees, food and fossil fuels will only increase as world population grows. Human activity has altered every aspect of our planet, including its climate. Shortages of clean water and arable land are already a problem, while species loss continues. The resilience of ecosystems – from fisheries to forests – is threatened.

Impoverished people, who contribute the least to climate change, are likely to suffer the most from its effects – drought, floods, heat waves, tornadoes, blizzards and other extreme weather disasters – and many will seek a better future elsewhere.

Wealthier countries, meanwhile, are consuming resources at a rate that the earth cannot sustain for all humankind. Rising expectations everywhere put more pressure on the earth, and will require everyone to adopt more efficient, 'greener' ways so that all people may have decent lives.

Our collective future depends on rapidly lowering greenhouse gas emissions while reducing excessive consumption. Greater social equity and slower population growth will help make cooperative solutions possible.

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### The Situation

- The world's richest half-billion people (7 per cent of the global population) are responsible for half the world's emissions of carbon dioxide, a main contributor to global climate change. The poorest half create just 7 per cent of those emissions.<sup>i</sup>
- Carbon dioxide emissions of one person in the United States today equal those of around 4 Chinese, 20 Indians, 30 Pakistanis, 40 Nigerians or 250 Ethiopians.<sup>ii</sup>
- The United States is the world's largest consumer in general: sustaining the lifestyle of the average American uses all the resources available from 21 acres of land (9.5 hectares). Germans require 10 acres (4.2 hectares), while Indians and most Africans require less than 2.2 acres (1 hectare). The world average is 4.8 (2.2 hectares).<sup>iii</sup>
- Worldwide, some 884 million people have no access to safe drinking water, and 2.6 million lack access to basic sanitation services such as latrines or toilets.<sup>iv</sup>
- Seeking safety from conflict zones or natural disasters, gainful employment or just a better life, some 214 million people have migrated to live in countries other than their own, and 49 per cent are female.<sup>v</sup>

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## The Trends

- Per-capita water consumption is rising twice as fast as world population. Over the next 20 years, the human need for fresh water will be 40 per cent more than today's.<sup>vi</sup>
- From 1970 to 2008, world-adjusted net financial savings fell by more than half (from 19 per cent of gross national income to 7 percent) while total emissions of carbon dioxide (the main “greenhouse gas” contributing to climate change) more than doubled.<sup>vii</sup>
- About 17,000 known species of plants and animals are at current risk of extinction by habitat loss, invasive species, high consumption rates, pollution and climate change that are not being adequately addressed.<sup>viii</sup>
- This loss of biodiversity reduces human food security, puts remaining species at greater risk of disease and extinction by natural disasters, and reduces possible sources of new medical and scientific breakthroughs.

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