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UN Launches Major New Initiative to Promote Role of Law in Advancing Sustainable Development

New York / Nairobi, 26 March 2012 – The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners have launched a new international initiative to promote the role of law towards achieving environmental sustainability and the transition to a low carbon, resource-efficient green economy.

Launched today in New York, the *World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability* will focus on actions needed to overcome the barriers that are impeding the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Convention on Biological Diversity or the Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes, among others.

Such barriers include the spreading of responsibilities for the environment among many different institutions at national and international levels, leading to the fragmentation of environmental governance.

The World Congress will examine how new legal approaches can strengthen the effectiveness of MEAs and, overall, advance environmental sustainability through stronger legal responses.

The launch took place less than three months before world governments will meet in Brazil for the Rio+20 Conference to map out the future course of sustainable development. The [institutional framework for sustainable development](#) is one of two key themes of Rio+20, the other being the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The World Congress will see Chief Justices and senior judges, Attorney-Generals and Public Prosecutors, compliance and enforcement officers, national auditors and legislators from across the world come together in Rio de Janeiro from 17-20 June 2012. The event will be co-hosted by the Association of Magistrates of the State of Rio de Janeiro (AMAERJ).

Key issues to be addressed at the four-day event will include: tackling fragmentation of current environmental governance, exploring relationships between human rights law and environmental law, improving public participation and access to justice, and the legal dimensions of advancing human well-being and transitioning to a green economy.

“Some multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Montreal Protocol on the Protection of the Ozone which has catalyzed a 98% drop in the consumption of ozone-depleting substances, are prime examples of what can be achieved when countries work together effectively on agreed legal frameworks. But despite the numerous agreements that have been negotiated since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the 1992 Earth Summit,

only limited progress has been made towards achieving internationally agreed sustainable development goals,” said Amina Mohamed, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP.

“The World Congress aims to play a vital role in highlighting the actions needed from legal practitioners to overcome this challenge, and promote the transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive Green Economy founded on the rule of law and effective governance,” added Ms. Mohamed.

The Government of Brazil, along with members of the country’s judiciary and auditing community, are supporting the World Congress.

Organizations active in the entire environmental legal spectrum - from law-making to implementation and enforcement - have also joined UNEP the initiative. They include the World Bank, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

The World Congress is intended to lead to the formulation and presentation of key guiding principles for strengthening the role of environmental law in achieving environmental sustainability through the outcomes of Rio +20 and beyond.

The outcome document from the World Congress event in Brazil will be presented to the President of Rio+20 and to the Heads of State and other high level representatives at Rio+20 by the Chair of the World Congress.

Beyond Rio+20, the long-term objective of the World Congress is to become an important platform in strengthening environmental laws and governance for the future national implementation of environmental law and policy.

The initiative will focus on three main areas:

- **The Future of Environmental Law**

The World Congress will focus on the role of environmental law in promoting the goals of a Green Economy. Other issues to be discussed may include the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the global commons such as the High Seas and combating transnational environmental crime and other illegal activities with transboundary effects.

- **New Approaches to Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability**

The World Congress will discuss ways to further strengthen the operational links between social justice, equity, environment and development in the further development and implementation of international and national environmental law. New approaches could include: more effective tools to ensure access to information, public participation and access to justice and the legal dimensions of accounting for natural capital in the context of a green economy.

- **Improving Effectiveness of Environmental Governance at national, regional and global levels**

The World Congress will deliberate on ways to overcome the fragmentation of environmental governance. Among the measures that are likely to be discussed are the role of courts and the evolving environmental jurisprudence, the requirement for effective and implementable laws, training for a wide range of legal practitioners, and stronger arrangements at the global level to look after the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Notes to Editors

The *World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability* builds on the work of the Global Judges Symposium, which was organized by UNEP during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The congress will create an even broader and more decisive platform for national legal stakeholders and their contributions to environmental sustainability.

More information on the *World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability* is available at: <http://www.unep.org/DELIC/worldcongress/>

More information on UNEP's Division of Environmental Law and Conventions is available at: <http://www.unep.org/delc>

Preparations for the World Congress began with a first Preparatory Meeting, held last year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A Second Preparatory Meeting will be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 23 - 24 April 2012, before the main event in Brazil in June.

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