



**World Environment Day 2019
4 June 2019**

**Remarks by
H.E. Ambassador Inga Rhonda King
President of the Economic and Social Council**

Madame President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today, in my capacity as the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, for the commemoration of the World Environment Day.

The theme of this year's World Environment Day "Air Pollution" is a critical issue for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—our global blueprint for delivering healthy lives for all, sustainable cities, universal access to clean energy and climate action.

While the issue of air pollution is specifically addressed in target 3.9 of SDG 3 on healthy lives and well-being for all, it also has critical interlinkages with the other SDGs. Improving air quality, for example, would help tackle poverty (Goal 1), reduce gender inequality (Goal 5) and fulfil targets on clean water and sanitation (Goal 6).

[The Problem]

Air pollution is a [global public health challenge](#) that threatens everyone from unborn babies, to children walking to school, to women cooking over open fires. We all know that without air there can be no life but today this vital resource has become an invisible killer. The pollutants that clog our lungs and seep into our bloodstreams are also accelerating climate change, threatening the health of the planet.

Air pollution is intricately connected to social and economic issues.

[Economic Costs of Air Pollution]

Air pollution also accrues significant economic costs around the world in direct and indirect ways.

According to [the World Bank](#), air pollution deaths cost the global economy around \$225 billion.

And OECD estimates that by 2060 the annual global welfare costs of premature deaths from outdoor air pollution would be [US\\$18-25 trillion](#), with the costs of pain and suffering from illness estimated at around US\$2.2 trillion.

There are other indirect effects of air pollution. Ground-level ozone is expected to [reduce staple crop yields](#) by 26 per cent by 2030, creating food security and nutrition challenges. Air pollution also degrades materials and coatings, decreasing their useful life and generating costs for cleaning, repair and replacement. The damaged items can also include objects of cultural significance.

Those costs can be alleviated with increased efforts to clean our air.

[Social Costs of Air Pollution – Public Health]

Air pollution causes significant damage to human health, damage that is unequally distributed across the world and affect developing countries most severely.

Overall air pollution is responsible for [more deaths than many other risk factors](#), including malnutrition, alcohol use and physical inactivity.

As well [as killing people](#), particularly in low and middle-income countries, air pollution is damaging our brains, making us ill, and shortening our lives. It has been linked to diabetes, increased risk of dementia, impaired cognitive development and lower intelligence levels.

[Social Costs of Air Pollution – Human Rights]

Poor air quality affects a wide range of human rights, including the right to life and an adequate standard of living.

Air pollution is a global issue that does not respect frontiers. It should be noted that under international human rights law, states have an obligation to cooperate in addressing environmental problems that cross national borders, including transboundary air pollution.

[Clean Air and the Sustainable Development Goals]

This year, we have the opportunity to accelerate action on air pollution, as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda to ensure no one is left behind.

This is because 2019 is a critical year for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. With the end of the first cycle of the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) we will complete the review of all the SDGs. And we will review our overall progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the HLPF Summit in September.

[What Can We Do?]

Air pollution affects all of us and we all have a role to play in keeping our air clean. The sources of air pollution are many but if we all play our part, we can work towards eliminating the dangerous pollutants that cost lives and weaken our planet's life systems every day.

Governments, cities and the private sector have critical roles. Each and every one of us can also be the change by making simple choices that reduce our own contribution to the toxins in our air.

We need policies to improve air quality. We need to use alternative modes of transportation. We must reduce consumption of meat and dairy to cut methane emissions. And we must continue to educate others about the dangers of air pollution.

Our solutions must be global, collective and sustainable. Many have already made a start and the positive results show that, together, we have the power to clear the air and secure a better future for ourselves, our children and our planet.

Thank you.