

# **UNEP Uses Google Earth to Put You in Cockpit of New Eco-Monitoring Service**

UNEP NEWS RELEASE from James Sniffen

Take a Five-Second Flight to Top Environmental Hot Spots

NAIROBI/WASHINGTON DC, 4 September 2008. People can "fly" to some of the world's most dramatic environmental hot spots courtesy of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)'s innovative use of the popular mapping tool Google Earth.

The new computer service allows armchair environmentalists as well as politicians, researchers and business executives to zoom in, whiz past and monitor close to 200 sites.

Here they can witness at first hand in 3D the impacts of climate change and other destructive human activities on the Earth's environment and natural resources.

Highlights include the appearance of road networks in the remote rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the dramatic expansion of many West African cities.

Other highlights, presented as a series of "before and after" images include the surprising changes in the glaciers of Greenland and Alaska and the loss of biodiversity-rich spiny forests to farms in Madagascar.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "If we are to change the hearts and minds of the global public we need to surprise, to excite and occasionally perhaps to shock. These images, allied to modern computer technology, do all three."

"But these 'fly-by' satellite sets do more. They also show humanity is equally capable of positive, intelligent and empowering change—from the reforestation of parts of Niger to a new management plan for the Itezhi-tezhi Dam in Zambia which is helping to restore natural and seasonal flooding", he said.

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These virtual "trips" are featured in UNEP's popular series of changing environment atlases including "One Planet Many People: Atlas of Our Changing Environment" from 2005 and the recently released "Africa, Atlas of Our Changing Environment".

Notes to Editors

On 13 September 2006, the Google Earth team released "UNEP Atlas of Our Changing Environment" as a part of the Featured Content layer including these environmental hotspots through their worldwide distributed data servers.

On 10 April 2007, Google Earth released the new UNEP materials for 120 environmental hotspots (the original Atlas has information on 79 environmental hotspots).

Google Earth created a new folder, called "Global Awareness" to showcase featured layers that are non-profit, public-benefit -- where they want to help draw the world's attention to an issue. Google Earth has over 300 million users worldwide. This release incorporates the latest technological tools developed by Google Earth.

Project coordinator, Ashbindu Singh, of UNEP's Division of Early Warning and Assessment, said: "Google Earth technology already allows a more informative and accessible means of delivering information about our changing environment. By keeping pace with the changing world of technology and media, UNEP helps the environmental community keep pace with the real changes in our real world."

The new service contributes to the International Year of Planet Earth which aims to capture people's imagination with the exciting knowledge we possess about our planet, and to see that knowledge used to make the Earth a safer, healthier and wealthier place for our children and grandchildren.

The International Year runs from January 2007 to December 2009, the central year of the triennium (2008) having been proclaimed by the UN General Assembly as the UN Year. The UN sees the Year as a contribution to sustainable development

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targets as it promotes wise (sustainable) use of Earth materials and encourages better planning and management to reduce risks for the world's inhabitants.

One Planet Many People: Atlas of Our Changing Environment and Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment are available to view at <http://na.unep.net> and at <http://earth.google.com/>

Both are available to purchase from UNEP's online bookstore <http://www.earthprint.com>

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