OpEd on World Environment Day 2017
‘Connecting with Nature’

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Every year, the 5th of June provides us with a great opportunity to reflect on issues concerning the environment. Issues that are increasingly assuming centre stage in our lives due to climate change.

World Environment Day (WED) is the United Nations principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment.

Over the years it has grown to be a broad, global platform which is used by key stakeholders for public outreach and advocacy for the environment.

It serves as the ‘peoples’ day’ for doing something positive for the environment, galvanizing individual actions into collective power that generates an exponential positive impact on the planet.

Over the last few decades we have gained, thanks to scientific advances and increased awareness of environmental matters, a much better understanding of the countless ways in which natural systems support our own prosperity and well-being. Whilst nature’s gifts are often hard to value in monetary terms, what they have to offer mankind is invaluable.

That is why this year theme is on “Connecting People to Nature,” is challenging us to find fun and exciting way to experience and cherish this all the natural beauty our environment offers us.
Whether you pay a visit to one of Uganda’s national parks, forests or take a boat ride one of the country’s lakes, WED is an ideal occasion to go out and explore what nature has to offer.

In the age of concrete, smartphones and other distractions of modern life, connections with nature can be fleeting, this World Environment Day is therefore geared at enabling all of us to realise that we need the harmony between humanity and nature so that both are able to thrive.

Connecting with nature therefore is a call for all of us to not only enjoy the beautiful environment around us but also to protect it, to work with governments and international bodies to ensure that laws put in place to protect are implemented so that this generation and the next one can enjoy nature too.

If we adhere to this call, we shall help Uganda achieve its aspirations for Vision 2040 as well the Sustainable Development Goals which call us to partner for the planet.


The Atlas which was launched during wetlands day early this year details the location and current state of wetlands in the country. It also provides recommendations on how to rejuvenate and protect wetlands in the country.

To ensure that the Atlas is not another document gathering dust, the United Nations is partnering with Government to develop the Presidential Initiative for Wetlands. The initiative is intended to accelerate the delivery of a comprehensive response to wetlands degradation which protects the wetlands and provides guidelines on how to resettle those who encroach on them in a humane manner.

Several other UNDP Programmes are geared towards protection of the environment, these include the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) to conserve biological resources by identifying cost effective ways of protecting biodiversity in Uganda. The project has supported the National Environment Management Authority to prepare a much needed policy and biodiversity expenditure reviews as well as a biodiversity finance Plan to ensure conservation of biological diversity for current and future generations.
Other projects such as the UN REDD is supporting the design of a National Forest Monitoring System while the Strengthening Climate information and Early Warning Systems (SCIEWS) project is supporting the government to set up the much needed information infrastructure for weather, climate and disaster management.

Our initiatives also target refugee hosting districts which are facing environmental degradation due to the increased number of people residing there. Through the Emergency Response and Resilience Strategy for Refugees and Host Communities UNDP is contributing to the joint UN system and World Bank Refugees and Host Communities Empowerment approach known as ReHope. Enabling access to vocational training and promoting alternative livelihoods are part of our efforts to help address the challenges of environmental degradation and improve access to modern energy in districts hosting refugees.

While Uganda has valiantly hosted a rapidly rising number of refugees in safety and dignity, time has come to mobilize the international community to support this approach. In this context, the UN Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres and His Excellency President Yoweri Museveni will be hosting the Uganda Solidarity Summit on refugees. The summit is intended to rally the international community to stand shoulder to shoulder with Uganda and mobilize investment for our humanitarian and development efforts especially as we work on a national strategy to promote green industrialisation and growth.

Green growth will enable Uganda to achieve development without harming its environment enabling it to achieve Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals as well as the goals in the National Development Plan II.

It is important to congratulate Uganda for ratifying most of United Nations Conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification among others, which focus on the major global environmental threats facing the world today. We call on the Government to ensure that these legal frameworks are implemented across the nation.

Today is World Environment Day, so I conclude by inviting each one of us to connect with nature and protect it. We can take action and help change behaviour in our schools, churches, mosques, community groups and most importantly our families. We only have this planet!