

Taking on environmental health risks, UN agencies aim to protect 'foundations for life' on Earth

10 January 2018 – Two United Nations agencies are teaming up in a major new initiative taking on the herculean task of combatting environmental health risks, which claim an estimated 12.6 million lives a year.

The partnership, announced Wednesday, between the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), includes specific action to address air pollution, climate change and antimicrobial resistance as well as improve coordination on waste and chemicals management, water quality, and food and nutrition issues.

"Our health is directly related to the health of the environment we live in. Together, air, water and chemical hazards kill some 12.6 million people a year. This cannot and must not continue," said Tedros Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, in a [news release](#) announcing the undertaking.

"There is an urgent need for [us] to work more closely together to address the critical threats to environmental sustainability and climate change which are the foundations for life on this planet. This new agreement recognizes that sober reality," added Erik Solheim, the Executive Director of UNEP.

The new collaboration has a particular focus on the developing world as the worst impacts of environmental pollution and the related deaths occur in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The initiative also includes joint management of the [BreatheLife](#) advocacy campaign to reduce air pollution for multiple climate, environment and health benefits.

The two UN agencies have been cooperating in a range of health and environment areas.

This latest partnership, is however, the most significant formal agreement on joint action across the breadth of environment and health issues in over 15 years, the agencies added.