



# DEWA~Europe/GRID-Geneva Quarterly Bulletin No. 3 - 2002

Volume 4, Issue 3, October 2002

## UNEP/Global Resource Information Database-Geneva

### UNEP's Window on the European Environment Launched

UNEP's European Portal is among the first group of environmental information portals to be made available within the framework of the globally distributed UNEP.Net information network. The European portal was officially launched in late September 2002. It aims to provide on-line authoritative information on the environmental situation throughout the pan-European geographic region, while highlighting key issues in specific problematic areas.

The UNEP.Net system was initiated in 2001 to support the integrated environment assessment process, most notably UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) series. The system is developing information portals for major environmental issues at global and regional levels, by linking and presenting vital graphics, core data sets and background material for efficient reporting and sound decision-making.

The European Portal benefits considerably from the work of the European Environment Agency (EEA) in

Copenhagen, as well as from other partners in the region. The EEA has long-standing experience in environment assessment, reporting and networking in (mostly western) Europe, as witnessed by numerous authoritative publications and information systems that cover the European environmental situation.

The other major partners for the European Portal are UNEP's Regional Office for Europe, the Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest, and GRID-Arendal in Norway. The development of UNEP's European Portal has been led by DEWA-Europe/GRID-Geneva, which will continue to maintain, expand and improve this key information resource on

The screenshot shows the UNEP Europe portal homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Home', 'About', 'Contact', 'Feedback', and 'Logout'. Below that is a search bar with placeholder text 'Search Europe' and a dropdown menu for 'Search type'. The main content area features a large map of Europe with color-coded regions. To the left of the map is a sidebar with sections for 'Environment', 'Policy', 'Statistics', and 'Publications'. A central column contains several links to specific reports and databases, such as 'The State of Europe', 'European Environment Outlook', 'European Environment Assessment', 'European Environment Policy', 'European Environment Observatory', 'European Environment Information and Observation Network', and 'European Environment Information System'. At the bottom of the page, there's a footer with copyright information and a link to 'DEWA Europe'.

UNEP's European Portal can be accessed at :  
<http://europe.unep.net> or through <http://www.unep.net>

the European environment.

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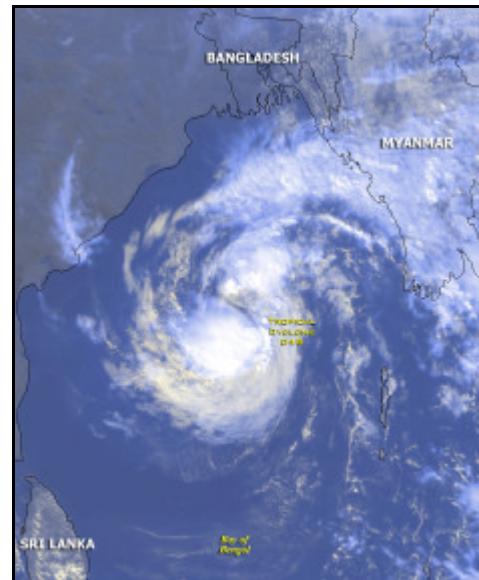
### New Global Data Sets on Tropical Cyclones

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As part of its information service on environmental disasters, UNEP/GRID-Geneva created a data bank on tropical cyclones for the period 1980 to 2000. Known as the 'PREVIEW Global Cyclones Asymmetric Wind Speed Profile', it comprises a series of annual spatial data sets showing cyclone tracks supplemented with information on their windspeed profile. Cyclone characteristics were computed using a mathematical model factoring pertinent data such as central pressure and wind speed, as recorded by nine centers affiliated with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

National centres have typically recorded cyclone characteristics using various methods and units of measurement. The aim of the PREVIEW Global Cyclones Polyline Tracks is to provide users with a standardised version, with all units converted into the metric system and data presented in the same order and format. This task involved the normalisation of the different formats and units used by the various centres. A software programme was also developed to automate the standardisation procedure, as well as to process



Tropical cyclone over the Bay of Bengal, October 2002. The storm shown is moving westward at 5 knots with maximum sustained winds estimated at 35 knots, with gusts to 45 knots. Image courtesy of NOAA.

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## Project to Study Lake Balaton's Vulnerabilities

Since the late 1990s, there has been growing concern about the changes affecting Hungary's Lake Balaton, the largest in Central Europe. Persistent indications of ecological degradation prompted the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), UNEP and the International Network of Resource Information Centers (INRIC; commonly known as the Balaton Group) to organise a joint workshop on 9-10 September, 2002 in Csopak, Hungary, of leading Hungarian and international scientists to examine the interaction of socio-economic and environmental forces affecting the lake, its environs and people.

The workshop's general conclusion is that due to a confluence of local and global pressures, including climate change, Lake Balaton has entered a phase of critical vulnerabilities. 'Early warning' signs are associated with chronically low and declining water levels. Despite the

advanced state of scientific research about the Lake, the causes, possible directions and impacts of these changes are not fully understood by experts, policy and decision-makers, and the affected public. In light of the serious uncertainties surrounding the Lake's future, participants agreed on the need to carry out a forward-looking integrated assessment to provide a better understanding of Lake Balaton's ecological and socio-system's vulnerability. Such an assessment would try to identify sustainability problems potentially arising in the coming decades, which should help lead to the formulation of preventive and adaptive strategies by local and higher level stakeholder groups and authorities.

To initiate the process, the workshop set up a small steering group to prepare a draft project document, gather preliminary data and mobilise resources for the project's implementation. Lake Balaton



Although the causes remain unclear, climate change is suspected to be contributing to diminishing water levels in Lake Balaton. (Landsat ETM, August 2000)

is by no means an isolated case potentially illustrating local and global climate change connections. The results of this case study could, therefore, provide inspiration and serve as a model for similar endeavours in other vulnerable systems, particularly those involving intensively managed shallow

lakes.

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## New Initiative on Environmental Reporting

On 26 September, the Danish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) hosted a conference in Copenhagen on "International Co-operation on Environmental Reporting and Information Management: Towards a Shared Vision and a Shared Information System". The meeting set out to address the increasing burden of reporting requirements assumed by countries as they continue signing up to new international agreements, both European and global. The key issue is for all users to agree on a common standard for the reporting of environmental data and information. In Europe, the main stakeholders are member states, organizations such as the OECD, Eurostat, the European Environment Agency (EEA), and international conventions and organisations.

The Copenhagen conference, which was attended by 45 countries and 25 European and international organisations, was

held in the context of the European Commission's proposed revision of the existing European reporting system. As part of this reform plan, a new framework Directive on environmental reporting is being drafted by the European Commission. Among other things, the new legislation aims to achieve data harmonization and ensure that reporting is more efficient and "policy-responsive".

A smaller follow-up meeting was hosted by the European Environment Agency on 27 September, to explore the practical modalities of responding to the reporting overload problem raised in the Danish EPA meeting. The future vision focussed on the eventual establishment of a shared European Environmental Information System (EEIS). Although various alternatives were proposed about the EEIS process and structure, all participants agreed as to the

need and utility of such a system. Follow-up meetings are scheduled to develop the EEIS initiative through a "step-wise" and participatory approach. The DEWA Regional Coordinator-Europe, Ron Witt, represented UNEP at both meetings and presented relevant assessment activities.

He confirmed UNEP's willingness to support this initiative once it gets underway, and which if successful could provide a useful model for other parts of the world.

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The aim of the proposed EEIS is to develop and promote a shared, multi-purpose European environmental information system.

## UNEP Exhibit at World Summit on Sustainable Development

On the margins of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), a number of additional, parallel events took place in the Johannesburg area. A central event was held at the Ubuntu Village which served as the cultural and infrastructural hub of the summit, providing an opportunity for people from diverse cultures around the world to interact, share and showcase their unique cultural heritage and its impacts on sustainable development through entertainment and exhibition activities. With 11,000 square metres of covered space, the main theme was the International Best Practice Exhibition, which provided both a forum and an opportunity for governments, inter-governmental organizations and major groups to profile practical hands-on solutions, partnerships and technologies in the implementation of Agenda 21. The exhibition was open from 17 August to 7 September, and to the public prior and post official Summit dates (26 August – 4 September).

While the WSSD was the scene of intense negotiations on the adoption of concrete steps and **Tropical Cyclones**

*(Continued from page 1)*

the 1,600 cyclone data sets and create the global coverage.

The newly-derived global coverage of cyclones will be used for various vulnerability assessments, including the calculation of physical exposure, which is a measure of the number of persons affected by tropical cyclones. It will also be used in a UNDP/UNEP project to assess 'Human Vulnerability to Environmental Change' by examining if warmer-than-usual temperatures are leading to higher frequency and intensity of cyclones, and by extension to a higher number of human casualties.

GRID-Geneva has also mod-

ification of quantifiable targets to implement Agenda 21, the Ubuntu Exhibition acted as a "common ground", providing an ideal platform for networking and dialogue amongst all sectors of society. For its part, UNEP organised an exhibition covering its suite of activities and projects. This included a panel display about the UNEP.Net project, for which GRID-Geneva is developing several Internet Portals. Also featured was the GEO Data Portal, created and managed by GRID-Geneva, and which was one of the major attractions at the stand. Many discussions and exchanges between visitors and UNEP representatives concluded in stimulating and inspiring ideas and led to a rich interchange of information and project materials.

For more information, please contact:

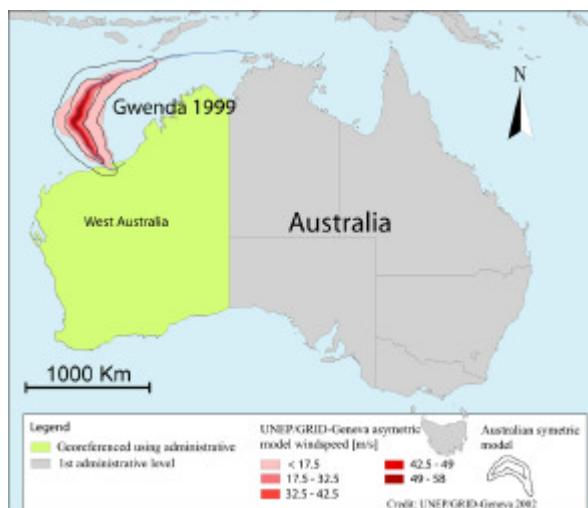
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The South African Welcome Ceremony for the World Summit held on the evening of 25 August at Ubuntu Village. (Copyright: Photosa.com)



Executive Director, Dr. Klaus Töpfer (right) at the UNEP stand in Ubuntu Village with Stefan Schwarzer, developer of the UNEP GEO Data portal.



Gwenda (1999), a comparison between a cyclone globally modelled by GRID-Geneva and observations carried out by the Bureau of Meteorology in Australia.

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### **GRID-Geneva Calendar of Events**

(October– December 2002)

#### **7-9 October**

Middle East Sub-Regional Meeting of the Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR), Beirut, Lebanon.

#### **10-12 October**

5th Euro-GRID Centers Meeting, Tbilisi, Georgia.

#### **14-16 October**

DEWA Workshop on Integrated Environment Assessment methods, processes and supporting tools, Tbilisi, Georgia.

#### **23 October**

CDS-CH Steering Committee Meeting, Bern, Switzerland.

#### **23 October**

3rd Meeting of ISDR Working Group, Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **31 October**

UNEP/GRID-Geneva 10th Advisory Board Meeting, Institut Forel, University of Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **31 October**

Open House at DIAE, Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **6-8 November**

Workshop on the "Assessment of High-Risk Disaster Hotspots" organised by the Earth Institute of Columbia University, New York, USA.

#### **18-26 November**

8th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, Valencia, Spain.

#### **26-27 November**

Conference on Outer Space and Global Security (UNIDIR), Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **28-29 November**

UNECE ad hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring special session, Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **2-5 December**

South Eastern Europe Workshop on "Environment and Security", Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

#### **25-30 November**

GEO Data Portal Workshop, San José, Costa Rica.

#### **6 December**

Global Databases and Information Systems, CUEH, University Geneva, Switzerland.

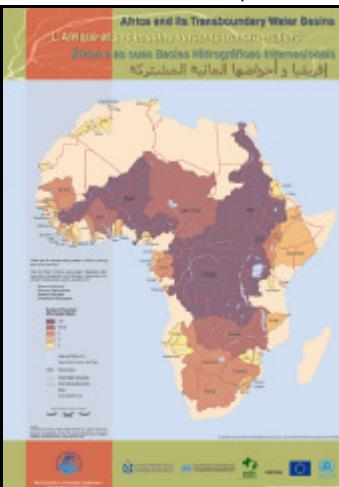
#### **3-12 December**

5th WMO International Workshop on Tropical Cyclones, Cairns, Australia.

## **Promoting Cooperation over Africa's Trans-boundary Rivers**

There are 59 trans-boundary basins in Africa, covering 60% of the continent. Twenty-nine basins are shared by two countries and the rest are shared by more than two. UNEP is encouraging integrated water resources management (IWRM) as a new approach for greater cooperation over Africa's trans-boundary basins. Some notable examples of inter-state cooperation include the Nile Basin Initiative, the Zambezi River System Action Plan and regional cooperation in the Lake Victoria area.

Highlighting the transcendence of water over political boundaries in the African context, GRID-Geneva created a poster map entitled "Africa and its Trans-boundary Water Basins". The map was



launched by partner organisations, the International Water Secretariat and Green Cross International, as part of the European Union "Initiative on Water" at the WaterDome in Johannesburg, South Africa. The WaterDome, which took place in parallel to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) from 29 August – 3 September, was a highly successful event with over 50,000 visitors. In addition to the poster exhibition, thousands of copies were handed out to participants and a large-scale jigsaw version of the map was on display for visitors to engage in trans-boundary water issues in a more recreational manner.

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Copies of the poster may be obtained from GRID-Geneva on request, or downloaded from our website.

## **Meeting of the SOIA Working Group**

The ninth meeting of the System for the Observation of and Information on the Alps (SOIA) was held in Monaco on 1-2 July 2002. At the meeting, GRID-Geneva reported on the various activities it had carried out on behalf of Switzerland. This included the maintenance and update of the SOIA website, which has been enhanced by the incorporation of dynamic webpages displaying contact information as well as new developments at SOIA. As for the Alpine Catalogue of Data Sources (Alpine CDS), this has been substantially augmented with meta-data from Liechtenstein and Monaco (subsequent to the meeting, Italy also provided its meta-data). Currently, the Alpine CDS holds over 3,473 addresses and 2,848 data elements on the Alpine mountain system. A report about SOIA activities including recommendations on future directions, will be officially submitted to the Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention, before the next conference which is due to be held on 19 November 2002. One of the key issues on the agenda is selection of a host country for the convention's Permanent Secretariat.

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