



5 June 2014 - According to experts of the World Health Organization, global warming claims an average of 140,000 lives every year. Climate change affects more than just the environmental conditions - it unbalances ecosystems, endangers food and reduces water sources. Scientists estimate that several hundred million metric tons of plastic pollute our oceans, killing and intoxicating our water and food supply. By the time the water reaches our lips, it is likely to be so polluted we might not be able to swim for our lives – unless we do something about it.

On June fifth, we celebrate World Environment Day. According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, “we have to rebut the myth that there is conflict between economic and environmental health.”

This year’s WED focus is on small island states. While small island states barely produce any greenhouse gasses, they are at the forefront of the battle against climate change. Many of these islands suffer the brunt of increasingly severe storms and some of them may soon disappear completely if sea levels continue to rise. “Raise your voice, not the sea level,” Ban declares in his message for the day. “Planet Earth is our shared island. Let us join forces to protect it.”

John Knox, United Nations’ independent expert on human rights and the environment, calls upon governments around the world to protect human rights by tackling climate issues. “Environmental degradation impairs the enjoyment of a vast range of human rights, including

the right to life, to health and to an adequate standard of living.”

But the right to speak out for the environment needs protection as well. Civil society activists working on environmental issues are increasingly at risk of being threatened and silenced, and their freedom of speech is a prerequisite for a sustainable future.

Creative solutions

Protecting our environment is not an easy task. But more and more people are using all their capacity and creativity to do so. Boyan Slat from The Netherlands is one of them. Although he is only 19 years old, he has designed a way to clean up the enormous amount of plastic waste in our oceans. Slat designed floating platforms which, using solar and wind energy, will be able to catch the plastic soup in our oceans and process it.

But what is more, Slat’s idea also seems to be economically profitable. “People often leave environmental issues to the next generation; my generation,” he says, “But we created this mess, please don’t tell me we cannot clean this up.”