

## **UNEP launches Green Building Initiative**

Paris, 21 February 2006 – A new international effort to “green” the multi-billion dollar building and construction sector was launched here today with some of the biggest names in the business.

Construction giants Lafarge, Skanska and Arcelor are among the founding members of the Sustainable Building and Construction Initiative (SBCI), which aims to promote environmental friendly practices across this vast industry.

The sector, which employs over 100 million people worldwide and contributes approximately 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), also seriously impacts on many of the world’s most pressing environmental problems like climate change, waste generation and depletion of our natural resources.

Whether it’s influencing multi-lateral environmental agreements, encouraging “green architecture” in high profile buildings or tackling topics like the illegal plundering of sand from pristine beaches the challenges for the industry are immense.

“The construction and use of buildings generate substantial social and economic benefits to society, but may also have serious negative impacts on the environment,” said Monique Barbut, Director of UNEP’s Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE) which hosts the SBCI secretariat.

“One key area of concern is the large share of energy use, with associated greenhouse gas emissions, that the built environment accounts for. In some countries the built environment is responsible for up to 40% of total energy use,” said Barbut.

“The overall objective of the SBCI is to achieve worldwide adoption of sustainable building and construction practices that can help deal with such problems,” she said. “We will also produce reports on key issues like the impact of energy efficiency in the built environment on climate change, and a manual linked to re-construction of buildings in the wake of natural disasters like the Indian Ocean Tsunami.”

“A key feature of the SBCI will be to bring recommendations to implementation, including the development of pilot projects,” she said.

It is hoped that the work of the SBCI will help ensure buildings are routinely designed, constructed and maintained from an environmentally sustainable point of view over their entire life span, taking into account what is called the “life-cycle approach”.

Other goals are that increasingly legislation and building standards include sustainability considerations and requirements. And, that policies and incentives provided by governments support sustainable building and construction practices.

The SBCI has been set-up as a neutral and worldwide platform, in partnership with international leading companies and others working in this area. As such it will be

able to provide direct input to other initiatives, governments and global bodies making recommendations and decisions affecting sustainable development in this sector.

It aims to complement on-going efforts in various countries that are designed to assess and compare the environmental performance of buildings such as LEED in the United States, BREEAM in the UK and HQE in France.

It will also partner with global initiatives like the Finnish-led Task Force for Sustainable Building and Construction (part of the UN's "Marrakech Process"). The new initiative was announced by Finland's minister of the environment, Mr. Jan-Erik Enestam during UNEP's Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Dubai earlier this month.

Speaking in Dubai, Minister Enestam said, "Not only buildings but the whole planning and construction process have an immense economic, social and environmental impact on the globe. As an example, in many countries buildings account for almost half of the total energy consumption and one third of carbon dioxide emissions. This alarming fact also reveals the great potential of increasing energy efficiency in building and construction processes."

Other partnerships will include the responsible investment working group under the UNEP Finance Initiative. The SBCI will also look to build on the existing work of UNEP DTIE's OzonAction programme in the refrigeration and air conditioning sector, which is tackling the problem of energy consumption in existing buildings.

Participants in the inaugural meeting of the SBCI in Paris today included a wide range of interested parties including construction and engineering firms, air conditioning companies from China and the USA, as well as government representatives, UN organisations, architects, research institutes and financiers.

Further details about SBCI can be found at <http://www.unep.fr/pc/>

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UNEP News Release