



*Solheim in Somalia. Photo: Odd Magna Ruud/Utrentiksdepartementet*

**Erik Solheim, the Norwegian diplomat and former politician, was appointed Head of the [UN Environment Programme](#) (UNEP) in June this year. Solheim was previously the Minister of Environment (2007-2012) and Minister of International Development (2005-2012), and head of the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)'s (OECD) [Development Assistance Committee](#). During his visit to Brussels, Solheim was interviewed by Christopher Lillehagen Hansen, Nordic Intern at UNRIC.**

– You have been the Minister of both Environment and International Development. Could you say a little about how these two issues, environment and development, are interrelated, and is the way forward to unite these two themes?

*They have to be united in all aspects, yet are much divided in the UN, ministries and NGOs. We have a big job to do to achieve unity in practice. It means encouraging development based on*

*solar and wind energy, not coal. You must also take biodiversity into account; maintain a holistic perspective. Taking care of the environment is an opportunity for the creation of new businesses, for example to utilise waste resources in a better way.*

– You previously have referred to the oceans to exemplify how environment and pollution are interrelated...

*That is a very good example. Overfishing is destroying the environment but it is also destroying livelihoods and development.*

– You have spoken out about the connection between the environment, conflict, migration and refugees. Could you say something about this connection, and what UNEP can do to tackle this issue?

*We have to be careful not to oversimplify; not all conflicts arise from environmental issues. Having been engaged in the Sri Lankan peace process for years, the environment was not the driving force behind the conflict there. However, environmental destruction is one of the main underlying factors of conflict in Somalia, Sudan, and areas around Lake Chad. It has made people homeless and given warlords something to take advantage of. Solving the environmental problems and conflicts at the same time is absolutely crucial.*

*The more war there is, the more difficult it is to solve environmental problems, and the more you see environmental destruction over time. Our ambition is to bring the environmental dimension into all these peace processes, together with other UN agencies. Just as an example, it is very interesting to consider how we can bring the environmental dimension into conflict-resolutions in Somalia.*

– This issue is very relevant to UNRIC's Nordic newsletter (available in [Norwegian](#) , [Swedish](#) , [Finnish](#) , [Danish](#) , and [Icelandic](#) ), which focused on the recent

[UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#)

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*The flow of refugees is of course due to conflict, but it is also due to climate change, and those things are not always easy to separate. If people become desperate then they flee for several reasons, and we must handle the situation as a whole.*

– A lot of people fear that we will see more and more climate refugees in coming years...

*With extreme sea level increases, major areas are becoming uninhabitable. There are also many regions that risk becoming uninhabitable as a result of other forms of extreme weather, such as cyclones and droughts.*

*On the other hand, nowadays some places are much stronger than they used to be. Bangladesh, for example, is much better prepared today than it was in the 1970s when a cyclone killed 500,000 people. This is thanks in part to mobile phones, and the fact that there are systems in villages outlining what to do during extreme weather. Both the government and civil society are prepared. Yet even while the country is better equipped, more extreme weather can also be expected.*

