



**GREAT LAKES UNITED**

November 19, 1991

Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba  
Executive Director  
United Nations Environment Program  
P.O. Box 30552  
Nairobi, Kenya

Dear Dr. Tolba,

We are writing to request that the United Nations Environment Project as part of its State of the Environment Report undertake an investigation into the failure of the United States and Canada to adequately protect and restore The Great Lakes Basin.

We are appealing to the United Nations because we feel, first, that the Great Lakes are a premier resource of global importance warranting international attention and scrutiny, and secondly, that the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement could be an outstanding precedent setting model for achieving environmental protection of international resources.

The Great Lakes are the largest system of fresh, surface water on earth, containing roughly 18 percent of the world supply. Because of the unique nature and structure of the Lakes, the Basin is a single ecosystem which is highly sensitive to the effects of a wide range of pollutants.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, a seminal agreement for the protection of international aquatic ecosystems, is intended to protect the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the Great Lakes. The Agreement was first signed in 1972 in response to an environmental crisis in the Lakes. At that time Lake Erie was considered dead. Trash, dead fish, industrial waste and sewage washed up on beaches. The Cuyahoga River (a tributary to Lake Erie) erupted into flames.

The central promise of the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement was the reduction of phosphorous loadings to the Great Lakes. Substantial progress was made under the 1972 Agreement. Lake Erie came back to life and the other Lakes were much less affected by excess algae.

But the Lakes were increasingly confronted by an even greater threat -- contamination by toxic chemicals. The Agreement was renegotiated and concluded in good faith by the respective governments in 1978, with a Protocol being added in 1987.

The 1978 Agreement pledged the two countries to work together using an ecosystem approach -- one that integrates all components of air, land, water, and living organisms, including humans -- to rid the Great Lakes of toxic contamination problems. The Agreement was based on a fundamental understanding that the only rational approach to managing persistent, bioaccumulative toxic pollutants is by achieving zero discharge and virtual elimination of those pollutants. Unfortunately, the two governments have failed to live up to their commitments.

Attached please find a copy of a recent report entitled, "Broken Agreement: The Failure of the United States and Canada to Implement the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement". This report outlines the specific instances where the national governments of Canada and the United States have failed to comply with the terms of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

The Great Lakes are still under great stress. For your information, attached also please find a copy of the summary of a report put out by the Canadian Federal Government detailing the effects of toxic chemicals on the Great Lakes.

In light of the failure of the governments to comply with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, we are requesting that the United Nations investigate the breaches of this Agreement and assess the implications of this for the Great Lakes. The critical state of the Great Lakes leaves us no choice but to request your attention in this matter. In our view, a thorough and comprehensive investigation would verify our claims and demonstrate the need for immediate preventive and remedial action.

An investigation of the experience with this international agreement will also provide valuable lessons on how to ensure that other international agreements on environmental matters are more effective.

This request is being respectfully submitted by environmental, labor, and public health organizations from throughout the Basin. The list of these organizations is attached.

Yours,



John Jackson  
President  
Great Lakes United

cc: Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar  
Dr. Noel Brown

ORGANIZATIONS CO-SIGNING  
GREAT LAKES UNITED LETTER  
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American Clean Water Project  
Atlantic States Legal Foundation  
Benedictine Sisters  
Buffalo Audubon Society  
Canadian Auto Workers - Local 1973  
Canadian Environmental Law Association  
Citizen's Alliance  
Citizen's Network on Waste Management  
Citizens Environment Alliance  
Citizens Environmental Coalition  
Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination  
Citizens for a Better Environment  
Coast Alliance  
Ecology Center of Ann Arbor  
Ecumenical Task Force  
Environment North  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Planning Lobby  
Erie County Environmental Coalition  
Friends of Allegany  
Grand Cal Task Force  
Greenpeace, Great Lakes Project  
Lake St. Clair Advisory Committee  
Michigan Audubon Society  
Michigan Environmental Council  
National Audubon Society - Great Lakes Regional Office  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Niagara Citizens for Modern Waste Management  
Niagara Residents for Safe Toxic Waste Disposal  
North Country Environmental Awareness Organization  
Oakland County Sportfishing Association  
Ohio Environmental Council  
Ontario Public Health Association  
Ontario Toxic Waste Research Coalition  
Pollution Probe  
Residents Organized for Lewiston/Porter's Environment  
Sanitary Chemists and Technicians Association  
Save the Dunes Council  
Sierra Club Binational Great Lakes Committee  
Sierra Club, Great Lakes Program  
Societe pour Vaincre la Pollution  
St. Clair River International Citizens Network  
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council  
Turnaround Decade  
UAW Local - 1102, Conservation Committee  
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Union Quebecoise pour la Conservation de la Nature  
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition  
Wallaceburg Clean Water Committee  
Windsor & District Labour Council, Environment Committee