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Climate change links 2008 Champions of the Earth award winners

Green achievers from Bangladesh to New Zealand will be honoured at international award ceremony in April in Singapore

Nairobi, 28 January 2008 – From protecting the unique biodiversity of Yemen's islands to piloting climate-proofing strategies in Sudan and boosting conservation in Barbados, the 2008 Champions of the Earth are making their mark across the planet.

Prince Albert II of Monaco, former US Senator Timothy E. Wirth and New Zealand's Prime Minister Helen Clark – whose country will host World Environment Day this year with the theme 'Kick the Habit: Towards a Low Carbon Economy!' – are among the seven environmental achievers chosen for this year's awards, the United Nations Environment Programme announced today.

The Champions of the Earth prize, which will be given out at a ceremony in Singapore on 22 April, recognizes individuals from each region of the world who have shown extraordinary leadership on environmental issues.

The other 2008 Champions of the Earth are: Balgis Osman-Elasha, a senior researcher at Sudan's Higher Council for Environment & Natural Resources; Atiq Rahman, the Executive Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies; Liz Thompson, the former Energy and Environment Minister of Barbados; and Abdul-Qader Ba-Jammal, the Secretary General of the Yemen People's General Congress.

All the winners have spearheaded outstanding initiatives in many different areas from environmental policy to cutting-edge research, with a particular focus on sustainable development and the fight against climate change.

The announcement comes on the eve of the 10th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council, which will bring together over one hundred ministers from around the world in Monaco on 20-22 February. This year's Governing Council will also focus on the urgent challenge of climate change – specifically, the issue of mobilizing finance to realize a low carbon world.

Achim Steiner, the UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director said: "Today, we face environmental challenges of unprecedented magnitude. More than ever, our planet needs committed leaders and achievers like the 2008 Champions of the Earth who spur real, positive change and fuel innovative solutions to environmental problems. In doing so, these inspirational individuals demonstrate not only that action

and different development paths are possible but also the abundant opportunities arising as a result of a transformation towards a green economy.”

2008 Champions of the Earth

UNEP SPECIAL PRIZE

Rt. Hon. Helen Clark

By setting a carbon neutral goal for New Zealand, Prime Minister Helen Clark has put her country at the forefront of today's environmental challenges. Three major policy initiatives launched by Miss Clark are also blazing new trails for sustainability and the fight against climate change: the Emissions Trading Scheme; the Energy Strategy; and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy.

Miss Clark's policies champion renewable energy and energy efficiency across key sectors of the economy. Her government is also achieving substantial work on environmental protection, from forestry and agriculture to improving public awareness and boosting private sector involvement in sustainability.

New Zealand will be hosting this year's World Environment Day – one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action. The event will take place on 5 June 2008 with the slogan 'Kick the Habit! Towards a Low Carbon Economy'.

AFRICA

Dr. Balgis Osman-Elasha

Dr. Balgis Osman-Elasha, a senior scientist from Sudan, is at the forefront of global research on climate change. A leading author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, she has produced groundbreaking work on global warming – the defining challenge of our era – in Africa, with an emphasis on northern and eastern Africa.

Dr. Osman-Elasha's emphasis on global warming and adaptation in Sudan is vital given the strong interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the country. Her work as a prominent researcher on climate change makes her a true role model for women in Africa.

The award also recognizes Dr. Osman-Elasha's efforts to educate Sudanese university students about the issue of climate change, thus raising awareness among the country's new generation.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Dr. Atiq Rahman

Dr. Atiq Rahman is an eloquent advocate for sustainable development from Bangladesh – a country highly vulnerable to climate change and flooding. As one of the top specialists in his field, the Executive Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) transformed the NGO into a leading think-tank in South Asia on sustainable development issues.

Dr. Rahman's extensive publications on the subjects of environment and development in Bangladesh are a reference for his peers, and he has also developed an innovative post-graduate course on sustainable development and North-South dialogue.

With his national and international experience in environment and resource management, Dr. Rahman's expertise remains vital throughout the Asia Pacific region and beyond as he helps to raise awareness of the hazards of global warming.

EUROPE

H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco

One of Prince Albert II's first acts as sovereign of Monaco was to sign the Kyoto Protocol – an eloquent sign of his longstanding commitment to the environment. Prince Albert has been a prominent voice on environmental issues since the early 1990s and he has been strongly involved in raising awareness on climate change, leading an expedition to the North Pole in 2006 to draw attention to the consequences of global warming.

The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, which he created in 2006, works actively on protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development, with a focus on biodiversity loss, water and the fight against climate change. Prince Albert is also a patron of the Billion Tree Campaign, which successfully led to the planting of well over a billion trees across the planet in 2007.

Prince Albert has also shown remarkable commitment to sustainable development on his home turf of Monaco. Under his leadership, Monaco is now applying an exemplary policy on CO₂ reduction in every sphere of society as well as in the business sector.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

H. E. Liz Thompson

Ms. Thompson has become one of the recognized leaders on environmental issues of the Small Island Developing States.

During her time as Minister of Energy and the Environment of Barbados, she enacted a range of progressive policies for sustainable development and environmental protection. She also became a key voice to raise awareness of global warming in Barbados – a country where the challenges of climate change and conservation are of particular relevance.

Ms. Thompson has also played a role in environmental awareness and protection across the Caribbean region. She has encouraged small island states to diversify their economies, undertake sustainability assessments, and promote community-based programmes that have positive environmental impacts.

NORTH AMERICA

Timothy E. Wirth

For the last thirty years, Timothy E. Wirth has been an advocate for environmental issues in the United States. As the president of the United Nations Foundation and Better World Fund, Mr. Wirth has established the environment as a key priority and is

mobilizing strong resources to address crucial issues from biodiversity to climate change and renewable energy.

A strong supporter of the Kyoto Protocol, Mr. Wirth was instrumental in raising awareness and calling for policy action on global warming during his time as US Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs.

Mr. Wirth was also a steadfast advocate on environmental issues during his time as a member of the US Senate, when he engaged in a number of conservation and natural resource issues in his state of Colorado. Mr. Wirth authored the Colorado Wilderness Bill as well as other successful legislation on energy, conservation and environmental protection.

WEST ASIA

H.E. Abdul-Qader Ba-Jammal

Mr. Ba-Jammal has had a truly pioneering influence on environmental protection in Yemen – a country which faces acute challenges from water scarcity to desertification. During his time as Minister and then Prime Minister, he established Yemen's Ministry of Water and Environment and Environment Protection Authority, solicited national and international funding for environmental conservation and sustainable water management, and implemented a series of groundbreaking environmental policies in Yemen and its region.

Mr. Ba-Jammal also orchestrated conservation efforts for the Socotra archipelago, a site of global importance for biodiversity. The Socotra conservation fund came into being under his patronage, and the archipelago was listed as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere reserve in 2003.

Among other achievements, Mr. Ba-Jammal also supported the declaration of several marine and land protected areas in Yemen and established a state agency for the development of Yemeni islands with a focus on marine resources conservation. Along with Mr. Ba-Jammal's work on Yemen's water sector, all these projects serve as key examples of environmental awareness in a region where water and conservation issues are of vital importance – increasingly so in a climate-constrained world.

Notes to editors

Champions of the Earth is an international environment award established in 2004 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The annual prize rewards individuals from around the globe who have made a significant and recognized contribution globally, regionally and beyond, to the protection and sustainable management of the Earth's environment and natural resources. Candidates are judged by a senior UNEP panel with input from UNEP's regional offices.

Past Champions of the Earth winners include among others: Ms. Massoudeh Ebtekar, the former Vice President of Iran; H.E. Mikhail Gorbachev of the Russian Federation; H.R.H. Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan; Jacques Rogge and the International Olympic Committee; and Al Gore, the former Vice President of the United States.

The Champions of the Earth are invited to accept their award at an international ceremony which will be held in Singapore on 22 April 2008. The event will be hosted in conjunction with the Business for the Environment Summit (B4E), details of which can be found on the UNEP website.

No monetary reward is attached to the prize – each laureate receives a trophy made of recycled metal especially designed by the Kenyan sculptor Kioko and representing the fundamental elements for life on earth: sun, air, land and water.

Background on the Champions of the Earth award and all the laureates can be found at www.unep.org/champions or from UNEP's communications division at championsoftheearth@unep.org.

UNEP's 10th Special Session of the Governing Council /Global Ministerial Environment Forum will take place at the Principality of Monaco on 20-22 February 2008. More information can be found at <http://www.unep.org/gc/gcss-x/>

For information on World Environment Day 2008, please visit http://www.unep.org/wed/2008/english/About_WED_2008/index.asp

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