



## UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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### **UNEP Announces the 2009 Champions of the Earth**

#### **Winners from Ethiopia, India, France, Norway, Papua New Guinea and United States Receive Coveted Awards at Gala Event in Paris**

**Paris, 22 April 2009** – Six tireless innovators of positive environmental change and an inspirational anti-poverty organization from Africa were today named as the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2009 Champions of the Earth.

This year's winners are: Norwegian Environment Minister Erik Solheim; tropical forest and climate campaigner Kevin Conrad; photographic and public awareness pioneer Yann Arthus-Bertrand; wind power entrepreneur Tulsı Tanti; biomimicry specialist Janine Benyus; recycling innovator Ron Gonen; and the youth-empowering Ethiopian organization Tena Kebena.

All seven laureates gathered in Paris on Earth Day to receive their trophies at a gala event attended by more than 200 personalities from business, politics and civil society.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, who presented the awards to the winners, said: "Today we celebrate and honour seven catalysts of positive environmental change who, through the worlds of politics, business, science, photography, resource efficiency and civil society have challenged the status quo and demonstrated across communities and countries new and transformational solutions to persistent and emerging environmental threats."

"Passion, creativity, intellect, vision and drive unites each of our 2009 winners—key qualities urgently needed with less than 230 days to go to the crucial UN climate convention meeting in December. Qualities also essential to turn the current and coming crises into an opportunity to realize a sustainable, Green Economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century," he said.

This year, the awards – which are hosted in conjunction with the annual Business for the Environment Summit (B4E) – moved away from geographical distribution to recognize achievements in the areas of Policy Leadership, Science and Innovation, Entrepreneurial Vision, Inspiration and Action, and Next-Generation Champions.

#### **Policy Leadership: Erik Solheim and Kevin Conrad**

**Erik Solheim**, Norway's Minister of Environment and Minister of Development, has been a key supporter of environmental actions at national and global levels throughout his political career, spearheading for example the early implementation of REDD – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

He also paved the way for Norway's membership as one of the founders of UNEP's Climate Neutral Network, catalyzing his country's action towards a low carbon society.

Erik Solheim said: "This award recognizes the need for policy leadership and concerted action on environment and development, with forests as a case in point. 17.4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions stem from forest activities. It is therefore crucial that countries agree to include reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in a new global climate regime. This will help us keep within the 2 degrees target, thereby avoiding the most dangerous effects of climate change."

His fellow laureate **Kevin Conrad**, the Executive Director of the Coalition of Rainforest Nations, hit the headlines at the 2007 UN Bali climate change talks when he urged the United States to take leadership on climate change.

Mr Conrad has become a tireless and vocal campaigner on better aligning fiscal and market incentives for improved management of tropical forests that better capture the economically-central services they provide to communities and to the global community.

Millions of dollars are now flowing into new and more creative ways of tropical forest management. It is likely that when governments gather in Copenhagen in December for the UN climate meeting, these efforts will bear even greater fruit triggering substantial flows into forestry conservation and nature-based carbon storage.

Kevin Conrad said: "Beginning today, we are obligated to catalyze a new 'Environmental Age' to safeguard our future. Valuing the ecosystem services of tropical rainforests is a necessary first step. To take root, however, we will require more hard-headed economics and less soft-headed tree-hugging!"

### **Inspiration and Action: Yann Arthus-Bertrand**

French photographer **Yann Arthus-Bertrand** has helped people around the world see our planet in a new light – beautiful, fragile, threatened – through his breathtaking aerial photographs from the remotest parts of the globe.

In 2005, Arthus-Bertrand formed GoodPlanet.org, an environmental organization whose objective is to educate about sustainable development and urge individuals across every culture and background to think about the future of all of our planet's inhabitants.

In recognition of his environmental achievements, Yann Arthus-Bertrand has been named as a UNEP Goodwill Ambassador. His latest project is 'Vu du Ciel', a documentary series broadcast on French television station France 2 that uses High Definition video and investigative journalism to document environmental degradation around the globe. The show celebrates scientists, environmentalists and members of the public who are engaged in the fight to save our planet.

Arthus-Bertrand is now preparing a feature-length film about our planet which will be distributed around the globe on 5 June, World Environment Day.

Yann Arthus-Bertrand said: "I am happy to receive this distinction because it comes from an organization whose work I have admired for a long time. The future of humanity rests on our ability to protect our environment, for our very existence depends on the life forms

that surround us. UNEP carries this message and is trying to mobilize the citizens of the planet, governments and businesses. This is also what I am trying to do with my work as a photographer and with GoodPlanet, the organization I created. For we are all responsible and we must all act for the planet and its inhabitants.”

### **Entrepreneurial Vision: Tulsi Tanti and Ron Gonen**

**Tulsi Tanti** is the Chairman and Managing Director of Suzlon Energy, the fifth largest wind turbine manufacturer in the world and the largest in Asia.

His company was an early mover in the multi-billion dollar renewable energy industry, exploring wind energy in the late 1990s as an alternative to costly and erratic electricity supply to its textile business. Suzlon has successfully demonstrated that renewables are not just a business opportunity for the developed economies, but a major contribution to the sustainable development of the developing world a key element towards a low carbon, Green Economy.

Tulsi Tanti said: “I am proud and honoured to receive this award and dedicate it to the 14000 strong Suzlon family, who have worked hard to convert my dreams into reality. Wind energy is the industry that in my opinion, will help kick-start the global economy in this hour of crisis. It is indeed a business for the environment, that has brought about true social, economic, ecological and sustainable development.”

Environmental activist **Ron Gonen**’s brainchild, RecycleBank, has helped increase recycling to over 90 per cent in many communities across the United States through a reward system.

The company, which has now spread to 18 states, is also working with schools and is running a pilot program with New York City’s Columbia University where special recycling kiosks are set up in cafeterias and dorms. To date, RecycleBank households have diverted thousands of tonnes of recyclables from landfills, saving over 98 million gallons of oil and more than one million trees.

Ron Gonen said: "RecycleBank is demonstrating that when financial incentives are aligned, people make the correct environmental choice. For me, this award is recognition that if you are willing to work hard enough, if you are willing to never give up, that what starts as an idea may one day be recognized as a global movement."

### **Science and innovation: Janine Benyus**

**Janine Benyus**, the winner in the Science and Innovation category, is a pioneer and champion of the biomimicry movement who is at the helm of the eco-design revolution.

Her 1997 book ‘Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature’ inverts the way we all think about design, industrial processes and areas from pharmaceuticals to energy developments. Ms Benyus’s central theme is that, by unraveling and learning how plants, animals and life-forms like bacteria have evolved over millennia, many of the innovations and solutions to the world’s pressing problems can be found setting the stage for new, biologically-based businesses and jobs.

Ms Benyus's work is a powerful argument for conservation of biodiversity, not just for its own sake, but as a key survival strategy for humanity and a central natural resource.

Janine Benyus said: "A sustainable world already exists, in the prairies, forests, tundras, and coral reefs of our planet. The search for solutions to problems like climate change should start here, emulating life-enhancing technologies that have been field tested for 3.8 billion years. This award is a great honor for all those who are shaping the emerging field of biomimicry, innovation inspired by nature."

### **Next-Generation Champions: Tena Kebena**

The Next-Generation Champions category was created to celebrate the new generation of dynamic, passionate individuals and organizations around the world who are making a real difference for the environment. The winners are **Tena Kebena**, an organization in Ethiopia that brings together around 80 children and youth who have been mostly orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The group cleans up and rehabilitates garbage dumpsites around the city of Addis Ababa through reforestation, turning mountains of trash into hills green with trees, herbs and flowers.

The sites are also used for urban agriculture – on what used to be a waste pile, the young gardeners are churning out lush rows of vegetables through organic methods and waste water collection. And agricultural produce and herbal medicines grown from the urban farm are sold to provide funding for the project and for the children's learning activities.

Tigist Tsegaye, a member of the Tena Kebena organization, said: "The Champions of the Earth award is opening the door to us for everything. With this award, we can grow and go further. This is a big thing for all the youth in the world, especially in Africa, and it is a very good opportunity for the next generation."

### **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.

No monetary reward is attached to the prize -each laureate receives a trophy specially designed for the occasion with environmentally-friendly materials.

Past Champions of the Earth winners include among others: Helen Clark, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand; Prince Albert II of Monaco; 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.

For more information visit the UNEP Champions of the Earth official website  
<http://www.unep.org/champions/>

The Business for the Environment Summit brings together hundreds of leaders from business, civil society, international organizations and governments in Paris on 22-23 April to discuss ways of powering green growth around the globe. The conference is co-hosted by UNEP and the UN Global Compact.

For more information visit [www.b4esummit.com](http://www.b4esummit.com)

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