

Biggest-Ever Youth Gathering on Climate Change to Call for Real Action in Copenhagen

Daejeon (Republic of Korea)/Nairobi (Kenya) – Emerging leaders representing three billion people – the children and youth of the planet – will converge on the Republic of Korea to voice their demands for action on climate change at the Copenhagen meeting.

The Tunza International Children and Youth Conference, in Daejeon (Republic of Korea) on **17-23 August**, will be the biggest youth gathering on climate change before the UN climate conference in December.

This will be a key opportunity for the more than 800 participants from over 100 countries to demand that their governments reach a scientifically-credible and far-reaching new climate agreement in Copenhagen. Over 45 children and young people are coming from Europe for this international meeting. From Ireland to Russia, Sweden to Azerbaijan, these young Europeans will share their green projects and vision with the rest of the globe.

By staking their claim to a low-carbon, resource-efficient, environmentally-sustainable future, the generation that will inherit the planet will also remind the world that they have the greatest stake in the creation of the green economy of tomorrow.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said: “The Tunza Children and Youth Conference is an important gathering of young people and an opportunity for them to discuss and to prepare their positions surrounding Copenhagen and climate change, but it is more than that. It is a gathering of the generation that will inherit the outcome of the decisions taken in December and beyond.”

“For it will be in the lifetime of the three billion children and young people alive today that the glaciers of the Himalayas will either persist or melt away; that the sea levels will stabilize or rise, swamping a third of Africa’s coastal infrastructure; that the Amazon will remain the lungs of the planet or become an increasingly dried-out and disappearing ecosystem, and the polar bear will continue as the iconic species of the Arctic or, like the Dodo and the dinosaurs, merely an artifact in the world’s natural history museums,” he added.

Some Highlights of the Tunza Children and Youth Conference:

- A Global Town Hall will use state-of-the-art technology to link the gathering to hundreds of other young environmental leaders who will be meeting around the globe – from Nairobi to Sao Paulo and from Stockholm to Bangkok – to agree on a message to deliver to world leaders.
- The Seal the Deal! Global Debate will bring together high-level figures from politics and green activism, including Korean Prime Minister Han Seung-soo,

Maldives Environment Minister Mohamed Aslam, Cameroon Environment Minister Hele Pierre, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner and prominent environmentalists such as David de Rothschild (who will sail to the Pacific Garbage Patch in a boat made of reclaimed plastic bottles) and Luo Hong (who raises green awareness through photography) along with young activists.

- The conference will also feature the global Awards Ceremony for the winners of the UNEP 2009 International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment.

The participants were selected from thousands of applicants based on their outstanding green achievements on their home turf – and the impressive range of initiatives illustrate just how much today's children and youth understand and want to commit to the environment.

Some of the striking and creative projects started by young Tunza participants include an award-winning original rap video by two Canadian teenagers on how to reduce your environmental footprint, a drive to distribute 500 low-energy lightbulbs in Nepal, a carpooling initiative in Samoa, the creation of a 'Navajo Green Economy Fund' to generate green jobs for Navajo youth, a recycling project in Sierra Leone and a river clean-up in Russia, among many other examples. All the initiatives will be put to a popular vote during the conference to determine the best one out of the several hundred on display.

The participants will also take part in a host of activities from the practical to the far-reaching, from making natural soap to sharing ideas on how to mobilize mass youth action for the environment. Through workshops on key issues including water, sustainable lifestyles and endangered species, they will have a chance to debate, discuss and share tips on how to make the world a greener place and take charge of their environmental future. Other activities in the packed weeklong schedule include sessions on green jobs, a workshop on making a solar energy car, the painting of a mural and a concert of instruments made from recycled material, among many others.

The Children and Youth Conference is part of the global UN-wide 'Seal the Deal!' campaign being spearheaded by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to galvanize political will and public support for reaching a comprehensive global climate agreement. Over the coming months, the 'Seal the Deal!' campaign will mobilize over one million young people to march across one hundred capitals and deliver to global leaders their declaration of priorities on climate change as agreed at the Tunza Conference.

Notes to Editors:

About the conference

The Tunza International Youth Conference is being hosted by UNEP and the UNEP National Committee for Korea with the support of the Daejeon Metropolitan Government and several UN entities including UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, WMO, UNESCO and

UN/DESA, as well as international youth organizations like the World Organization of the Scout Movement and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), and private sector partners, such as the Bayer corporation, the Hyundai-Kia Automotive group and Samsung Engineering.

About the participants

The children and youth taking part in the conference were selected from 3,000 applicants on the basis of their environmental projects and how active they are on green issues. This year's edition is the first time the Children and the Youth are being brought together for the same conference – the 'children' participants are 10-14 years old and the 'youth' participants are 15-24.

About the Town Hall

The Seal the Deal! Global Town Hall will be facilitated by the Washington-based nonprofit Global Voices, which has pioneered the use of technology to convene large-scale deliberations to impact policy making.

About the International Children's Painting Competition

The top winners of the 18th International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment will be announced in Daejeon on 20 August. More than 2.4 million children from around the world took part in the artistic competition about the challenges of climate change and what we can do about it. The competition is organized every year by UNEP, the Japan-based Foundation for Global Peace and Environment (FGPE), Bayer and the Nikon Corporation.

About Tunza

The Tunza Youth Strategy, adopted in 2003 by UNEP's Governing Council, is a long-term strategy to engage young people in environmental activities and in the work of UNEP. The word 'Tunza' means 'to treat with care or affection' in Kiswahili. The Tunza initiative aims to develop activities in the areas of environmental awareness and information exchange on the environment for children and youth. For more information, please visit www.unep.org/Tunza/

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