

United Nations Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

GREEN STAR AWARDS TO HONOR LEADERS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

GENEVA, 17 November 2008 - The launch of the first Green Star Awards, organised by a triumvirate of leading international environmental and humanitarian agencies, aims to draw attention to the importance of efforts to reduce the impact of large-scale environmental emergencies.

The Green Star Awards will honor individuals, organisations, governments, and corporations who have made special efforts to respond to environmental emergencies with a non-monetary award. Winners can come from each category or multiple winners can come from a single category, depending on the results of the expert panel evaluation.

A collaborative initiative of Green Cross International (GCI), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the awards will advocate for civil society, governments and corporations around the world to do what they can to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the environmental impacts of man-made and natural disasters.

Generally speaking, an environmental emergency can be defined as a sudden onset disaster or accident resulting from natural, technological or human-induced factors, or a combination of these, that cause or threaten to cause severe environmental damage as well as harm to human health and livelihoods.

Recognizing the need to adopt a worldwide strategy for taking preventive and mitigating measures for environmental emergencies, the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE), for which the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit serves as secretariat, called for the establishment of an awards scheme to highlight the importance of environmental emergencies. In the words of UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, *"Environmental degradation is aggravating human-kind's vulnerability to natural disasters from floods and droughts to storm surges and mudslides. Investing and re-investing in the planet's ecosystem infrastructure, from forests and soils to wetlands and coral reefs, can go a long way to buffering at-risk communities from the worst of the impacts while also being a major adaptation policy against climate change"*.

The Green Star Awards will underline the connection between the adverse impacts of environmental emergencies and their consequences on affected populations and providers of humanitarian assistance. *"We must recognize the inseparable nature of environmental emergencies and humanitarian crises,"* said GCI Founding President Mikhail Gorbachev. *"With the increased frequency and severity of such events due to climate change, it is becoming more and more important to treat environmental emergencies as an indispensable part of a holistic response effort."*

Environmental emergencies often occur during natural disasters, technological accidents and complex humanitarian emergencies. However, funding and large-scale preventive measures are still lacking in many countries throughout the world, specifically in the economically less developed countries which make the impact of environmental disasters more significant. *"Disasters and conflicts can impact the environment in ways that threaten human life, health, livelihoods and security. Disaster managers and humanitarian workers must therefore identify and address acute environmental risks quickly and consistently as an integral part of effective*

emergency response", said UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes.

The first Green Star Awards ceremony will take place on Friday 8 May 2009 at the conclusion of the 8th meeting of the international AGEE which will be hosted in Brussels, Belgium, by the European Commission. The deadline for receiving nominations is 30 January 2008. **For full details on the nomination process, please visit www.unep.org/greenstar**

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