

PEOPLE

Mikhail Gorbachev is one of seven 'green leaders' celebrated as the **2006 Champions of the Earth** by UNEP. The awards, presented for the second time, recognise prominent and inspirational environmental leaders from each region of the world.

Mr Gorbachev received the award for Europe on 21 April – at a gala event hosted by UNEP, the Singapore Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and the Singapore Tourism Board – for being “a champion in the field of international environmental politics and for conflict prevention on waterways globally.”

His citation described how “as President of the former USSR, he made policy changes aimed at halting the worst contamination and destruction in the country – changes such as closing thousands of heavily polluting factories and preventing a major scheme to divert the rivers of Siberia.” It noted his foundation of Green Cross International and his work with the organization on water conflict prevention initiatives in the Middle East, Africa, South America, Central Europe, and in his own native river basin, the Volga.



Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher of Ethiopia, a champion against the patenting of life forms and for community rights, was given the award for Africa. He was commended for having “built a strong group of well-prepared African negotiators with united,

strong and progressive positions” at such biodiversity-related fora as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Food and Agriculture Organization and for “encouraging African countries to develop and implement community rights, a common position on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and a clear stance against patents on life”

The award for Asia and the Pacific was presented to **Tommy Koh** for his contributions to the cause of the environment by chairing the main committee and preparatory committee of the 1992 Earth Summit and for spending a decade helping to negotiate the landmark



1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, being elected President of the negotiating conference in its critical final year.

Rosa Elena Simeon Negrin of Cuba, a champion of small island developing states and a regional

force behind the philosophy of “thinking globally and acting locally” posthumously won the award for Latin America and the Caribbean. “Her steadfast, committed and selfless work has been vital for fostering the notion of sustainability and for raising the environmental awareness of Cubans” said the citation.

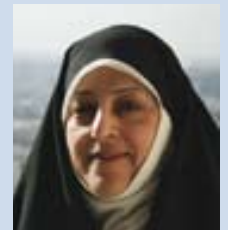


Mohamed El-Ashry of Egypt – a champion for the wise use of natural resources and a former head of the Global Environment Facility – was presented with the award for West Asia after more than 35 years of protecting the environment through a career spanning

academia, public sector institutions, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and international institutions.

The award for North America went to a group – **The Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)** – which for over 15 years has championed women’s economic, social and gender rights and has been a beacon for the empowerment of women across the environment and development debate. Established in 1990 by former U.S. Congresswoman Bella Abzug and feminist activist and journalist Mim Kelber, it continues to galvanize the energy and spirit of women worldwide for a healthy and peaceful planet.

In addition, **Massoumeh Ebtekar**, Iran’s first female vice-president and a champion of cleaner production in the petrochemical industry, was awarded a special prize. The citation says that her “philosophy that sustainable development depends on maintaining the balance between economic growth and environmental concerns is one that the United Nations shares”.



Klaus Toepfer, UNEP’s outgoing Executive Director, said at the announcement of the winners in late March. “A renaissance in environmental politics and policy needs the long-term commitment and vision of men and women. It needs people who have been and continue to be Champions of the Earth.”

The ceremony was held with the support of sponsors and partners including the Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings (APRIL), the Lien Foundation and Nanyang Technological University. Other supporters include: CNN, Fortune, Time, Eco 4, The World Foundation, Singapore Environment Council, Channel News Asia and Today.

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