

CELEBRATION DAY

World Environment Day was started at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, and has been celebrated internationally since 1987. It was set up to raise awareness and encourage environmental action, and it prompts activities by all sorts of people all over the world.

Last year people in 110 countries took part in activities to consider how we use and treat water. The theme was 'Water, 2 billion people are dying for it'. This year we are thinking about water again, but this time about the seas and oceans and the life that depends on them, as we ask 'Wanted: seas and oceans, dead or alive?'

Over the years young people have created art, essays and poetry on the theme of the day, and exhibitions of their work, street marches and parades have done a lot to raise awareness. Trees have been planted, art and



UNEP / INGRID KAVANAGH

fashion crafted from waste, wells dug, botanical gardens created and rivers, parks and beaches cleaned up – among a host of practical environmental activities. Then there are public debates and discussions on environmental issues between people from the media, art, academic, business and sporting worlds, and many others.

This year World Environment Day is being celebrated on 4 June in Barcelona, as part of a three-month long cultural festival in the city – which should make the environmental campaigns, street rallies, parades and musical concerts even bigger and louder than usual.

Sea Green

Thousands of people will descend on Athens' beaches and waters to clean them up on World Environment Day this year, just in time for the world to come to the ancient city for the Olympic Games.

Groups of school children, members of the World Olympians Association and divers will clean the beaches and shallow waters of the Greek capital's coastline, whilst tugboats



AEF

with cranes pull up some of the bigger objects submerged further out to sea. The waste will then be separated and recycled or disposed of carefully.

The clean-up is part of a huge effort initiated by the Athens 2004 Organizing Committee and the Athens Environmental Foundation to put the environment at the heart of the Games and to take the opportunity of their return to their original home to 'green' the city.

'We need to stop using the ocean as a garbage can,' says Jean-Michel Cousteau of the Athens Environmental Foundation. 'The pollution that we are inflicting on marine life ends up hurting every one of us and the quality of all our lives. If we protect the ocean we protect ourselves.'

WHAT GOOD IS SPORT? ⁷



UNEP

Why should Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, be interested in sport? Surely he has far too much on his hands with wars, international emergencies and the growing crisis in the world environment to be bothered with it?

Yet he said at the Winter Olympics two years ago: 'Sport can play a role in improving the lives of individuals – not only individuals, I might add, but whole communities. I am convinced that the time

is right to build on that understanding, to encourage governments, development agencies and communities to think how sport can be included more systematically in the plans to help children, particularly those living in the midst of poverty, disease and conflict.'

And he set up the Sport for Development and Peace Responsibility Centre, and appointed a special advisor, Adolf Ogi, to encourage the use of sport in work with refugees, child soldiers, delinquent youths and communities in conflict.

SO WHAT GOOD CAN SPORT DO?

On a practical level, it improves health, making the body more resilient against disease. It also provides something to do in places where there is little else, helping to reduce drug use, crime and violence.

Playing sport is a 'school for life' – teaching such qualities as leadership, fair play and confidence, often to people who cannot get other forms of education. Over time it is a powerful tool in development.

The United Nations also hopes that its 'neutral playing field' can

provide a site for peace and conflict resolution. Sport brings people together on a common ground. Peace keepers hope that by forging relationships and relating to each other when they are having fun, conflicting groups will start to resolve differences and to abandon prejudices.

The United Nations is liaising



UNEP / GILBERTO CAUALCAN

with programmes working to integrate refugees and resident groups in Thailand, to encourage Roma children in Romania to attend school, to give an outlet for energy and frustration to young people in detention centres in Brazil, and to improve the strength and skills of disabled people in Kenya so that they can work – to mention just a few.

CHAMPIONS' WREATH

History is being made by Olympians and school children on every continent planting trees to create a 'wreath' around our planet to honour the Olympic homecoming to Greece, and spread a message of peace and goodwill. Organized by the Athens Environmental Foundation (AEF), the planting will ripple around the world until the Games begin in Athens, in August 2004.



In Baghdad school children and Olympians Mohamed Taher, Fakher Al-Jamaly and Hassan Bahriya planted their tree at the Al Jadriya College, in the presence of members of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Iraq's Olympic Committee executive board.



AEF