

ENVOYS OF IDEAS

For the seventh year running, professors, posters and pamphlets urged youth around the world to join in the drive towards sustainability with UNEP and its first private sector partner on youth environmental outreaches, the Bayer Group.

Out of hundreds of applicants from Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, 44 young people were named Young Environmental Envoys under the UNEP-Bayer partnership for their dedication to promoting sustainable development in their countries.

Envoys flew to Bayer's corporate headquarters in Germany in late November 2004 for a weeklong field trip. Aged 16-25 years, with backgrounds ranging from chemistry to forestry to law, some had never travelled outside their countries before, while others were veterans of international conferences. Yet they had a shared commitment – backed with corresponding eco-projects – to environmental protection in their respective fields.

Future leaders

Mr Dirk Frenzel of Bayer called the youth 'envoys of their countries as well as of ideas' – particularly the idea of sustainable development. He expressed the company's hope that they become future leaders across many sectors, from industry and research to politics, journalism and non-governmental organizations.

During the week, senior corporate and government officials

presented Germany's adoption of ecologically integrated industrial processes, building environmental considerations into production.

Through workshops, seminars and site tours, envoys examined technical and policy-based responses, and discussed how these could be adapted for use in their countries. Many agreed with Anusha Kothandaraman, 20, of India, that environmental protection must be 'simultaneously cost-effective and profit maximizing to be feasible in developing economies'.

They also supported the view of David Orjuela Yepes, 22, of Colombia, that 'in developing countries, people must first care and become conscious of current environmental situations: this is needed to assure solutions for future generations'.

'Push for change'

UNEP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Surendra Shrestha encouraged envoys to not wait but to 'push for change'.

Dr Udo Oels – Bayer board member responsible for innovation, technology and the environment – addressed shared responsibilities between businesses, governments



and individuals. He said: 'A concerted international policy, a commitment by industry to more environment-friendly products and processes, and environmentally conscious behaviour by our citizens have to go hand in hand.'

Exchanging thoughts

Envoys mingled between sessions, comparing theses, swapping business cards and sharing project ideas. Yan Xiaowei, 19, of China remarked: 'It's exciting knowing what people with the same dreams are doing in their countries: we can exchange thoughts and come away with two ideas instead of one.'

Bayer's Miho Oka concluded: 'For us, it's very important that envoys return home with knowledge and experience to their own countries and share them with their generation. We hope they become stakeholders in the future: we are expecting much from these young people.'





'As youth, we must focus on fresh, creative methods for change.'
Hyung Won Lee, 24,
 Republic of Korea



'I came here wanting to be inspired again, because in China there is much necessity for increased activity.'
Dong Xiaotong, 23, China



'Industry and environmental protection must go together, and this means continually developing better methods and new applications to improve the system.'
Débora Maia Periera, 22, Brazil



'I believe that young people should know more about ecological issues, since we're the ones who will work with problems in the future.'
Michal Przybycin, 23, Poland

conference photos: Bayer



From Small Beginnings

As a child, girl scouting introduced me to nature, and tree planting marked my introduction to stewardship of this wonderful planet. This led to greater endeavours. From where I live in the Philippines, I was elected as Chair of Save the Mother Earth Movement. At our eco-camps, talks and activities promoted environmentalism among students and encouraged sustainable environmental practices.

At school I investigated using potato starch to produce easily degraded plastics and in 2000 I qualified for the Youth Research Apprenticeship Program, where I opted to work with the Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources on toxic metal removal.

'Being an envoy is a commitment to a sustainable future'

Then in 2004 I was chosen as a Bayer Young Environmental Envoy, after a thorough national selection process. This has widened my perspectives and given me a greater role in a global effort to create a better world.

I am now working on a campaign where usable, recyclable solid waste from my university is sent to nearby *barangays* or neighbourhoods to be processed into useful products or composted. The finished products can then be marketed - supporting local livelihoods. It is a simple project, yet it could have a great impact on the environment.

Being an environmental envoy is not just a distinction - it is a commitment to creating a sustainable future. My vision is of a planet where people enjoy their environment and all that it has to offer without destroying it and without compromising the needs of generations to come.

With my small endeavours, and those of all of the young people from different regions sharing the same aim, I am optimistic that this dream is fast on its way to becoming a reality.



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