



TUNZA

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Partners for Youth and the Environment



UNEP and Bayer, the German-based international enterprise involved in health care, crop science and materials science, are working together to strengthen young people's environmental awareness and engage children and youth in environmental issues worldwide.

A partnership agreement lays down a basis for UNEP and Bayer, who have collaborated on projects in the Asia and Pacific region for nearly 10 years, to step

up current projects, transfer successful initiatives to other countries and develop new youth programmes. Projects include: TUNZA Magazine, the International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment, the Bayer Young Environmental Envoy in Partnership with UNEP, the UNEP TUNZA International Youth Conference, youth environmental networks in Asia Pacific, the Asia-Pacific Eco-Minds Forum and a photo competition, 'Ecology in Focus', in Eastern Europe.

‘Hispaniola is a marvel: hills and mountains; plains and meadows; land beautiful and fertile for cultivation and harvest, for all manner of livestock, and for dwellings and townships.’

Christopher Columbus

in a letter of 1492 describing the island now comprising Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Haiti, its hillsides stripped bare, has become the poorest country in the Americas.



Topfoto

Congratulations to Lau Tsun Ming from Hong Kong (China), global winner of the 15th International Children’s Painting Competition on the Environment. The competition has been held every year since 1990 and has received more than 170,000 entries from children in over 100 countries.



Editorial

‘Forests precede civilization,’ it is said, ‘deserts follow’. It has been so since humanity first settled down from a nomadic life. More than 3,000 years ago, *Gilgamesh* – the world’s first ever written story – warned against the cutting down of the cedar forests of Mesopotamia. It went unheeded and the region is now desert, with Uruk – the great city where it was written – no more than a bump in the sand. Plato lamented how ancient Greece had been stripped of trees and soil, while the Mayan civilization of Latin America also partly owed its demise to desertification.

Now the same process threatens much of the world. Land degradation affects one third of the Earth’s land surface and endangers the health and livelihoods of over a billion people, more than one in every seven people on the planet. Over 100 countries – rich and poor – are affected. So is every continent apart from Antarctica. It is probably the world’s most widespread environmental crisis.

For the first time, however, the

world is at least recognizing the problem. An international treaty – the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification – came into force 10 years ago. And 2006 has been designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification to try to call attention to the issue. This is also the theme of the worldwide celebrations of this year’s World Environment Day.

Sadly, progress in tackling the problem over the last decade has been painfully slow. Perhaps because it mainly affects marginalized and poor peoples – often from ethnic minorities – it has rarely been a top priority of most governments or of the international community. And yet the longer it is ignored, the worse it gets, putting all our futures at risk. It is a tall order to reverse the trend of thousands of years, to turn back the desertifying blight that has both doomed successive civilizations and been their legacy. But it has to be done – and done within the lifetime of our generation. We must seize the challenge.

