



If you happened to be in the Taman Wetland Putrajaya on 28 August, your confusion at being surrounded by tree-planting children would have been understandable. It's not every day that 250 children from 60 countries get together to plant a forest. Yet forest planting was only one of the many activities that occupied delegates attending the 2006 UNEP Tunza International Children's Conference.

Themed 'Save a Tree, Save our Lungs', the Conference was held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 26 to 30 August. Delegates aged 10 to 14 were selected, based upon their involvement in environmental clubs in their home communities. The event provided delegates with an opportunity to meet their peers from around the world and a forum for them to discuss and learn about their environmental rights and responsibilities. Delegates presented their own activities, voiced their concerns and shared ideas about the environment, conservation and sustainability.

HRH Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah Binti Al-Marhum Tengku Abdul Rashid, Queen of Malaysia, presided over the opening ceremonies, encouraging participants to cement friendships and learn from each other in the coming days. All were then enthralled by performances by local children, especially a play, 'Tears of Trees'. The production's amazing costumes added depth to the storyline: that trees must be allowed to grow and reproduce to maintain the healthy ecosystem we call Mother Earth.

The four days were full of activity, fun and information. Workshops addressed such diverse topics as 'How to become an Eco-Journalist', 'Let's make Paper out of Waste', and 'Saving the Marine Turtle'. Each morning, a selection of delegates presented summaries of their own environmental projects. There were also field trips to the PETRONAS Towers, the Botanical Garden of Putrajaya, and the Forest Academy's innovative research centre. And, of course, there was the forest planting.

Delegates, chaperones and volunteers planted at least one tree each on behalf of their country. Covered in mud but hugely satisfied, the children continued planting after they had finished their own country's task – helping their neighbours in a truly global effort. The new forest was named Rimba Tunza Taman Wetland Putrajaya, which roughly translates as Tunza Forest.

After four eventful days the Conference came to a close. The final day was a whirlwind. Elections for the Junior Board took place in the morning, and by early afternoon the new representatives had been named (see box). These talented young people will work hard over the next two years to organize and shape the direction of the 2008 Tunza International Children's Conference in Norway. The closing ceremonies began with an eye-popping fashion show. Conference participants, chaperones and volunteers graced the catwalk wearing the latest look in wearable recycled waste. And, before leaving, all delegates agreed a Conference contract, committing both them and UNEP to concrete action to continue their efforts to protect the environment and raise awareness.

The success of the Conference is best summed up by 14-year old Nikolaos Theofilidis from Greece: 'Until the Tunza Children's Conference, I knew only about environmental problems in Greece. But here I learned about other parts of the world. We all need to change our attitude to the environment. The Earth is our home and by harming it we harm ourselves.'

Tunza Fun!



2008 Tunza Junior Board

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