



Five leaders receive first-ever Green Star Awards

Brussels, 7 May 2009 – A Brazilian scientific support centre and leading Swiss laboratory are among the winners of the inaugural Green Star Awards announced in Brussels today.

The Green Star Awards honour individuals, organisations, and governments who demonstrate outstanding dedication to preventing, preparing for, and responding to the environmental impacts of man-made and natural disasters.

The 2009 winners are Mike Cowing of the United Nations Environment Programme; The Center for Scientific Support in Disaster Situations (CENACID) of Paraná Federal University in Brazil; Spiez Laboratory of Switzerland; the Government of the Netherlands; and the Government of Sweden.

“These first ever recipients of the Green Star Awards have demonstrated immense dedication to and capacity for responding to environmental emergencies and also to helping affected populations both immediately and in the long run. Due to climate change and the increased frequency and severity of such disasters, it is important that the world becomes aware of environmental emergencies and the best way to respond quickly and adequately,” said Alexander Likhotal, the President of Green Cross International. .

The awards are a joint initiative between Green Cross International (GCI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“These awards highlight the environmental impact of natural and man-made disasters. I hope that by improving awareness of the environmental consequences of such emergencies, we can improve response to future disasters by having more actors involved,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Green Star Awards recognize the efforts of leaders whose work ultimately contributes to the stability of post-crisis societies, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner, said.

“The links between environmental degradation, natural resource depletion and tensions that can evolve into conflicts is becoming ever clearer to the international community and will become ever more challenging unless climate change and unsustainable patterns of development are comprehensively addressed,” Mr Steiner said.

“2009 needs to be a year when the world not only seals the deal on a transformational new climate agreement, but also begins delivering a Green Economy—one that accelerates the fundamental shift to a low carbon and resource efficient future that fosters innovation, decent employment and equity between countries and communities, especially in some of the poorest and most vulnerable parts of the globe,” he added.

The new awards scheme provides a platform to promote and increase international participation in preventing, preparing for and responding to a range of environmental disasters.

An international jury of environmental emergency experts selected the winners – two governments, two organizations and one individual – based on their work in a variety of domains, including international capacity-building missions aimed at helping countries prepare for environmental emergencies and support to international response missions to countries affected by environmental emergencies.

The awards ceremony is held in conjunction with the 8th meeting of the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE), which is being hosted this year by the European Commission.

The seventh meeting of the AGEE in June 2007 recommended that an award be created to highlight the importance of environmental emergencies. They are defined as a sudden onset disaster or accident resulting from natural, technological or human-induced factors, or a combination of these, that cause or threaten to cause severe environmental damage and harm to human health and livelihoods.

More detailed information on the Green Star Award and all the winners, including biographies and photographs, is available at www.unep.org/greenstar

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