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UN's Billion Tree Campaign Hits its Seven Billion Goal Target

Global Climate Change Initiative Inspires Millions in Run-up to Crucial Copenhagen Conference

New York/Nairobi, 21 September 2009 –The global public's desire to see action on climate change was clearly spotlighted today with the announcement that the Billion Tree Campaign has reached 7 billion trees—one for every person on the planet.

Over the past three years millions of people ranging from scouts to presidents and from schoolchildren to city dwellers and corporate heads have been rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty for the environment through tree planting.

Today's milestone was reached with the news that the Government of China has planted 2.6 billion trees as part of this unique campaign, bringing the total to 7.3 billion trees planted in 167 countries worldwide.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "Seven billion trees, seven billion commitments to action and seven billion reasons why governments should be inspired to Seal the Deal at the crucial UN climate change convention meeting in Copenhagen in less than 80 days' time."

"When this campaign was launched in 2006, there were those who said it could not be done. But day after day and week after week, people have got out into their gardens, parks and cities and into the countryside and the rural areas to prove the doubters wrong," he added.

"Above all the Billion Tree Campaign shows that the simple act of planting a tree resonates and unites the child in the slums of Africa with a president in Mexico, or a corporate CEO in Paris with UN peacekeepers in Timor-Leste. It is the kind of solidarity that now needs to be expressed at the level of all governments and heads of state between now and December in order to move economies towards a low carbon, sustainable path," said Mr. Steiner.

The Billion Tree Campaign was launched jointly with the World Agroforestry Centre during the UN climate convention meeting in November 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the patronage of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai and His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco.

Its initial goal was to catalyze the pledging and the planting of one billion trees as a way of giving public expression to the challenges of climate change and also forest and ecosystem degradation.

Since then the Billion Tree Campaign has more than surpassed its aims, evolving into a true 'People's Campaign' – more than half (52 per cent) of all the participants are private individuals.

Furthermore, tree planting has become both an inter-faith and an inter-generational activity, with the trees symbolizing connections between children and parents and bringing together people from different religious backgrounds.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Kenyan Green Belt Movement and the campaign's co-patron, said: "Let's plant even more trees to celebrate this wonderful achievement, the fruit of collective action from people all over the planet. By making the Billion Tree Campaign such an incredible success, people from every continent are calling their governments to truly start caring for the planet and to find unity in the fight against climate change."

His Serene Highness Albert II, the Sovereign Prince of Monaco and the campaign's co-patron, said: "I have always had a strong belief in the symbolic strength of the *Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign* and I am delighted that it has exceeded our greatest expectations, far beyond the welfare linked to replanting trees, to benefit future generations."

Highlights of the Billion Tree Campaign

In the past eight months China planted 6.1 billion trees, of which 2.6 billion have been given to the Billion Tree Campaign. With the announcement of these 2.6 additional billion trees, the grand total number of trees planted for the campaign stands at 7.3 billion as of 21 September. The government planted 260 different species of trees in eleven provinces around China, from Inner Mongolia to Yunnan and from Shandong to Sichuan.

The announcement was made in New York on 21 September at a press conference attended by international dignitaries, including Campaign Patrons Wangari Maathai and Prince Albert II of Monaco, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, China's Minister of the State Forestry Administration Jia Zhibang, and Mohamed Nasheed, the President of the Maldives. The announcement coincided with Global Climate Week, an event launched to mobilize global mass action around the UN high-level event on climate change – including the Global Tree Planting Drive on 19 September where people were encouraged to plant trees on every corner of the planet.

A number of other countries around the world have planted impressive numbers of trees since the campaign was launched. Countries that have planted more than a hundred million trees range from Ethiopia (with 1.4 billion trees) and Turkey (711 million trees) to Mexico (with 537 million trees) and countries including Kenya, Cuba, and Indonesia.

In addition to bringing governments to take concrete action to reforest their lands, the Billion Tree Campaign has succeeded in catalyzing tree planting from all walks of society, bringing together creative, original and pioneering initiatives around the world.

To name a few, the Replant New Orleans Initiative sponsored a planting of fruit trees to help breathe new life into a community struggling with the aftermath of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina; the Greening Soweto Campaign is transforming dustbowls into treed

lanes in Soweto by capitalizing on South Africa's preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup; and 132 children in 56 countries have pledged to plant a total of one million trees as part of the 'Stop talking, Start planting' campaign, which was started by an eleven-year-old boy.

The economic gains of tree planting are powerfully illustrated by the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative. As well as being close to planting 38 million trees in the Appalachian region, the North American organization has also devised a green job tree planting proposal to stimulate the economy of Appalachia and reap the ecological benefits of a region-wide reforestation effort.

In addition, the Campaign has mobilized groups and individuals in post-conflict areas around the world, bringing the seeds of hope to communities in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Liberia and Somalia among others.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has planted 9 million trees in and around refugee camps around the globe, helping to plant hundreds of thousands of acres of trees in Asia and Africa since the 1990s.

The United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Field Support (DFS) have also participated in the campaign, with thirteen peacekeeping missions having pledged 117,848 trees. Of this number 33,184 trees have already taken root across various countries hosting peacekeeping missions. The campaign, which encouraged the planting of indigenous trees appropriate to the local environments, has not only witnessed the participation and enthusiasm of UN staff, but also of the local communities in the different areas of operation.

The private sector has become a key player in the global campaign, accounting for almost 15 per cent of all the trees planted. Multinationals from Accor to Bayer and from Toyota to Coca-Cola East and Central Africa and Yves Rocher have been active tree planters, along with hundreds of small and medium-sized companies the world over.

The campaign's universal appeal is clear from its success on social networking sites, with some 4,000 blogs adopting the cause early in the campaign.

Proving true its motto that *'Every tree counts, and we count every tree'*, the Billion Tree Campaign's phenomenal success is a result of the participation of people of all walks of life and from every corner of the planet.

Achim Steiner said: "When we first launched the billion Tree Campaign in 2006, people truly responded. At first they planted hundreds of trees, then it was thousands, and then millions-and then we reached 1 billion trees. Then we made the bold decision to issue a call for the world to plant 7 billion trees, one for each person on the planet. And our target even got exceeded: the counter now stands at 7.3 billion trees. (...). As the Secretary-General convenes Heads of State tomorrow for the Climate Summit, there can be no more powerful sign of people's will that we need to seal the deal in Copenhagen."

Prince Albert saluted Professor Wangari Maathai and said: "We have reached the 7 Billion mark - this is a huge success and I am honored to have been part of this. This campaign has made it possible for representatives of civil society, Heads of State and children to take action together."

Paying tribute to Achim Steiner and to UNEP, Professor Wangari Maathai said: "I want to salute the extraordinary performance by China. It is a great privilege to be part of this campaign. UNEP put a lot of work and energy to continue to inspire people around the world for this campaign. If you look at the Roll of Honour, it's amazing what governments have been able to contribute. It's also just fantastic to see the participation of young people. I want to thank all the people from all over the world who have participated - thank you for your commitment. On the week that the world leaders congregate at the UN, this is a great demonstration to our leaders that we care about the environment and, as young Felix said, we don't want any more talking - we want to see action. I hope we take this commitment to Copenhagen to get a fair deal on climate change. Through the Billion Tree Campaign, we show that we want to save the planet - for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren."

Felix (11 years old) said: "In 2050, I will be 53 years old. If we don't start acting today, we won't be able to solve all these problems by the time we are adults. Most adults seem to like talking - but by talking, we won't make the glaciers stop melting."

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