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## UNEP Picks Top African Winners in the 17<sup>th</sup> Children Global Painting Competition

*Maria Kassabian, 10 years old from Abuja, Nigeria emerges as the regional winner*



**Nairobi, 22 April 2008-** The United Nations Environment Programme's Regional Office for Africa is today announcing the regional winners of the Seventeenth International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment to mark this year's **Earth Day**.

Children, aged 6 - 14 years old, from across the world were competing for the top places in the Seventeenth International Competition on the environment. They were asked to express their thoughts on climate change through the medium of art, by drawing and painting their vision of how each and everyone can lessen his foot print or minimize activities that

adversely affect the climate, in line with the theme "Climate change: Action we can take now to reduce our negative impact".

The regional winner, Maria Kassabian's painting was selected out of 288 entries from 17 countries, which qualified for the competition. The jury composed of the representatives of the organizers concurred that her entry, showing the vision of two contrasting scenarios of the gloomy situation against the ideally restored environment, best portrayed the theme of the competition whilst capturing relevance to the region and creativity.

Maria Kassabian, 10 yrs old, from the American International School of Abuja in Nigeria, painted the industrial causes of climate change, particularly air pollution with scenes of smoke rising from factories. She also portrayed renewable sources of energy that our continent should gear at in adapting to climate change and thus preventing an environmental crisis in Africa. She also brought out tree planting which can be practiced especially by the youth; and her feminine depiction of the earth's elements of wind and the sun reflected on women as being the backbone of the African society, hence the leaders in changing attitudes in order to protect our planet's resources.

Climate change is one of the most critical global challenges of our time. Recent events have emphatically demonstrated our growing vulnerability to climate change. The impacts of climate change will range from affecting agriculture – further endangering food security – sea-level rise and the accelerated erosion of coastal zones, to increasing intensity of natural disasters, species extinction and the spread of vector-borne diseases.

The 1st and 2nd runners up are respectively Sonia Bhayani, 7 yrs old, from Jalaram Academy, Kisumu in Kenya and Shinghai Phineas Dumba, 13 years old, from Mkhosana Township in Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

” We are very happy that this competition inspired tips and actions to solve an important problem that would affect life on Earth. The competition aims to get the children thinking about environmental impacts of human activities and clearly they have shown a good grasp of issues and have keen minds and a sharp eyes for detail,” said Mr. Peter Acquah, in Charge of UNEP’s Regional Office for Africa. “ This year again it was quite evident that much change is needed to protect the environment and we hope the winning entries will catalyze the world and adults to move ahead and take concrete steps to mitigate the effects of climate change. UNEP’s Children Competition should be seen as part of a local, national, regional and global campaign to promote the benefits of sustainable development options.” He added.

Each year, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) joins hands with the Japan-based Foundation for Global Peace and Environment (FGPE), Bayer and Nikon, together to recognize and encourage the rich artistic talents of children around the world. Launched in 1990, this worldwide event has produced an impressive number of local competitions, yielding more than 200,000 school and high school winners in over 100 countries.

Ms. Tomoko Yano, Secretary General, Foundation for Global Peace and Environment has this to say: “Children’s paintings always reflect the state of the crisis of the environmental destruction, expressing their sorrow with unique and creative ideas. At the same time, they show us various kinds of ways, what we should do or what we can do to preserve our Mother Planet for the future generations. We deeply wish that their genuine messages will move much more people around the world to take actions together for confronting our common threat, Climate Change.”

Bayer is UNEP's primary partner for its children and youth activities. The German-based international enterprise with core competences in the fields of health care, nutrition and innovative materials currently supports the TUNZA programme with sponsorship amounting to one million Euros per annum.

"The children's pictures are giving one common message to all other people: safeguard our planet Earth", says Michael Schade, Senior Vice President of Bayer AG, and continues "We are very happy about the great popularity of the painting competition which is one of the important projects of Bayer's partnership with UNEP. Sustainable development is an integral element of Bayer's corporate policy and with our social commitment we strive to contribute to a good future for ourselves, our children and the coming generations."

Each UNEP Regional Office (Bahrain, Bangkok, Geneva, Panama City, Washington DC, and Nairobi) chose regional winners and also submitted at least 100 paintings to the global selection. The selection of the global winners will be made by a Jury comprised of representatives of all the organizers. These global winners will be announced on 5 June 2008 at the main international celebrations to mark World Environment Day in Wellington, New Zealand.

All regional first prize winners and the global winner will each receive a cash prize and a trip for them and an accompanying adult to Wellington, New Zealand, the 2008 official World Environment Day celebrations. Other prizes include diplomas, plaques, T-shirts, stationary and drawing sets.

The winning paintings will be exhibited at various venues in Japan, Germany, New Zealand and other countries, as well as on the websites of the Competition organizers. In the past, painting competition entries have been used on UNEP posters, post cards, calendars, in UNEP publications or environmental magazines distributed worldwide.

## **Note to editors**

### **About the competition**

About 300 entries were received from all the regions in Africa, out of which 288 from 17 countries were qualified for this 17<sup>th</sup> International Children Painting Competition on the Environment. The countries included Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Niger, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Some entries were disqualified due to long messages being displayed on the artwork, age, etc.

Other winners in Africa will be recognized at a special ceremony during the World Environment Week 2008, alongside the winners of the Essay, Art and Photographic Competition currently being carried out in schools in Kenya. The best entries will be exhibited at a special prize giving ceremony in Nairobi.

The Children's Painting Competition is part of UNEP's TUNZA programme for children and youth. 'Tunza' means to treat with care and respect in Kiswahili and it is a wide-ranging programme to involve children and young people in environmental issues. The programme aims to provide young people with information and tools on how to “treat Mother Earth with care” and how to act for a better world.

### **About the partners**

The cooperation of UNEP and Bayer has been in place for over a decade and covers organizing competitions for World Environment Day, supporting conferences and providing opportunities for young people to participate in environmental study tours and international learning forums.

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