

Remarks by Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

8 minutes

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize Gala Dinner - February 23rd 2011

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

Members of the Diplomatic and UN Communities,

Representatives of major groups, civil society and the private sector,

Edward Norton, award-winning actor and UN Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity,

The Nippon Foundation – our long-time partner in this recognition for grassroots green entrepreneurs

Ms. Wakako Hironaka - Esteemed and valued jury member, welcome back this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2011 UNEP Sasakawa Prize Award Ceremony – a special event in the UNEP calendar where we reward and recognize spirit, innovation and determination to find and implement solutions to better manage and use natural resources – an urgent imperative.

Science tells us that environmental degradation is increasing - but simultaneously - we have ever-better intelligence on what's needed to reform current practices and manifest transformative change.

We need only look at the findings from UNEP's Green Economy report released this week across ten key sectors to see that now more than ever, we need to reward and encourage innovators and leaders.

The world is witnessing daily transformation - some arguably for better, some for worse – but there can be no doubt that opportunities and the knowledge how to shape and refocus economies and current unsustainable patterns have never been more available.

On the heels of the 2010 Year of Biodiversity, we are now well into the UN designated Year of the Forests.

As highlighted by the film we watched earlier, narrated by someone who has spent a lifetime watching and documenting environmental change, Sir David Attenborough, it is time to firmly acknowledge that forests are cornerstones of our economies, whose real value has all too often been invisible.

The real worth of forests has emerged in stark detail in *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB) work which estimates that deforestation and forest degradation are costing the global economy between US\$2.5 and US\$4.5 trillion a year.

Forests have essential links to livelihoods and climate change and other environmental challenges - including the UN's Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development as a whole - something the two award winning projects illustrate.

UNEP's Green Economy report cites that a contribution of \$15 billion a year, over the next forty years - or 0.03 per cent of global GDP – could green the forest sector and raise the value of the forest industry by more than 20 per cent, relative to business as usual.

In line, this year's Sasakawa theme is : “Forests for People, Forests for Green Growth”.

The co-winners of the 2011 prize are examples how to create and nurture sustainable development in remote rural communities of Latin America and Asia - in this case by promoting agro-forestry or looking at forest certification.

These projects, with tangible benefits to support pro-poor development amongst forest-dependent communities, underline how the shoots of a Green Economy are emerging across the globe amongst rich and poor communities alike.

This evening we are also launching a special UNEP edition of a beautiful book called, ‘Forests and People’ collated by UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

As well as examining the biological, cultural and economic dimensions of forests - this book is part of an effort to acknowledge the pivotal role they play - and reframe debate and investment of increasing numbers of public and private actors in the forest sector.

We are delighted to give each of you one as a gift and souvenir of this event and to celebrate and increase appreciation for the planet's forests this year.

Ladies and gentlemen – again welcome – congratulations to the prize winners and I wish you all a very enjoyable evening.

Notes: Brief profiles of the co-winners

Asociacion Forestal Integral de San Andres, Peten (AFISAP) is an organization dedicated to the comprehensive management and conservation of an area of 51,939 hectares located in the Multiple Use Zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. By adopting Forest Stewardship Council-certified best practices, AFISAP protects the biodiversity of the forests and the cultural values of the Mayan archeological sites, while also preventing deforestation due to forest fires and unmanaged agricultural expansion, and generating economic and social benefits for the local communities. The organization annually harvests around 585 trees within an area of 600 hectares or a density of approximately one tree per hectare. It utilizes best practices, including the strict protection of bodies of water and high-value conservation sites, path planning, guided logging and the use of light machinery.

Manahari Development Institute – Nepal (MDI-Nepal) is committed to the promotion of responsible agroforestry in the hill slopes of Makawanpur district in Nepal where only 7 per cent of the land is cultivable and the rest are under serious threat of destruction from deforestation, slash and burn practice, and other unsustainable practices that result in devastating floods and landslides. The organization's approach helps reduce soil erosion and its consequences that can include aquatic habitat alteration, coastal contamination, and loss of productive farm land. With the involvement of the indigenous community, MDI-Nepal delivers economic and social benefits to more than 2,000 households by improving the productivity of marginal lands with the planting of various fruit crops, and by providing clean energy technologies, such as solar home systems, improved cooking stoves and biogas stoves.