

African Youth Take Firm Stand to Protect Biodiversity

The Regional Tunza Conference for Africa Kicks off today ahead of world celebrations for World Environment Day

Kigali/Nairobi, 02 June 2010- About 36 young environment activists from fifteen countries representing all the sub-regions of Africa are gathering in Kigali to forge a strong African Youth Voice for biodiversity protection, at the initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in partnership with Bayer and in collaboration with the United Nations Coordination Office of Rwanda, UNDP and the Ministry of Youth of Rwanda.

The Youth Conference themed “*African Youth Standing up for Biodiversity*”, is organized as part of the celebrations of global celebrations of World Environment Day being held in Rwanda.

The four-day conference will allow the Africa environmental youth to discuss key concerns about diversity and how the major challenges can be successfully tackled and what role the youth of Africa can play in this collective endeavor.

UN Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner said: “The Youth is the generation that will have to spend their lives with the decisions we make today and will implement most of the solutions we are forging today. For that reason, their opinion means a lot to all of us, as UNEP and the whole United Nation family. Their substantive involvement at national, regional and international fronts will ensure that African youth voice is heard. This means that they need to be empowered. Our immediate challenge is therefore to build the capacity needed to handle the defining environmental challenges of our time such as loss of biodiversity, climate change, and desertification.”

The Tunza Regional Youth Conference aims at raising environmental awareness among young people and creating a better understanding of the impacts of human activities on the environment as well as the importance of biodiversity conservation.

The conference is also meant to consolidate the regional network of young environmentalists from the continent to enable UNEP to better engage young people in fulfilling its mission.

It is hoped that a powerful African Youth Voice for the IYB - African Youth Statement will be discussed, agreed upon and promoted and that best practices in environmental protection will be captured from experiences of the participants. It is also expected that a stronger, well informed, cohesive and sustainable youth network would emerge from this conference.

Note to editors

The Tunza Regional Youth Conference is part of UNEP's TUNZA programme, a UNEP's strategy to train future leaders in dealing with environmental issues and to educate them about sustainable development. '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.

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 through sponsorship of its outreach activities. The cooperation of UNEP and Bayer has been in place for over a decade and covers organizing internal children 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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