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Green Star Awards honour Environmental Heroes working in Disasters and other Emergencies

Bern (Switzerland), 18 May 2011 – A not-for-profit organization tackling life-threatening pollution in developing countries and a renowned academic working to make houses safer during earthquakes are among the recipients of this year's Green Star Awards (GSAs), announced by the United Nations and Green Cross International today.

The full list of 2011 winners is as follows:

- Dionysia-Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Member of the Greek Parliament
- Dr. Mary Catherine Comerio, Professor of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley
- The Blacksmith Institute, a US-based non-profit organisation
- Environmental engineering firm TerraGraphics
- Artsen zonder Grenzen (Médecins Sans Frontières - Holland)
- Linda Norgrove (Posthumous Award)

Ms. Dionysia-Theodora Avgerinopoulou was recognized for her pro bono work to support reconstruction efforts following environmental emergencies, such as the wild fire that devastated areas of the Peloponnese region in Greece in August 2007. The selection committee also honoured Dr. Mary C. Comerio for her invaluable work in the area of post-disaster reconstruction following earthquakes in China (2008) and in Haiti (2009-2010). Finally, Ms. Linda Norgrove was given a posthumous award in honour of her outstanding leadership and commitment in responding to the severe environmental challenges facing Afghanistan, and for her efforts to avert future environment emergencies in the country. Ms. Norgrove was kidnapped in Afghanistan in October 2010 and died during a rescue attempt.

Organisations being recognized this year include the Blacksmith Institute, an international non-profit organization dedicated to solving pollution problems in low and middle income countries, where human health is at risk. Its current programmes in highly polluted locations in the developing world include Mozambique, Nigeria and the Philippines. Terragraphics Environmental Engineering is being awarded for its promotion of environmental clean-up methodologies in developing regions. Finally, Artsen Zonder Grenzen was recognized for its ongoing contribution to environmental emergency response efforts, specifically in regard to lead poisoning in the Nigerian state of Zamfara in 2010.

The Green Star Awards emphasize the connection between environmental risks from disasters and conflicts, crisis-affected populations, and providers of humanitarian assistance. They recognize the achievements of individuals, organizations, government and private enterprises that have demonstrated leadership in preparing for, responding to, and reducing the environmental impacts of disasters and conflicts.

The awards ceremony was held in Bern, Switzerland, on the heels of the ninth meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE).

“Given the multitude and scale of environmental emergencies the world is experiencing, recognizing those helping to prepare and respond to these catastrophic events is increasingly important,” said Alexander Likhotal, President of Green Cross International. “This year’s class of Green Star winners demonstrates the depth of efforts being taken worldwide.”

“Recent events in Japan, the forest fires in Israel and Russia, as well as the toxic lead pollution in Nigeria underscore the relevance of the work undertaken by the 2011 Green Star Awards winners,” said Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. “These individuals and organizations have all contributed substantially to saving lives and livelihoods, now and in the future.”

“I want to pay tribute to the Green Star award winners. They make our work possible, they make our work meaningful and very often they make the difference between life and death”, said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

“In the work of UNEP over the years, post-disaster and post-conflict work has become more and more important and, in fact, it has now become one of our six major areas of work. We see our role contributing through the lens of the environmental dimension of these emergencies as being a critical part of the international family to try and assist in these often very trying circumstances.”

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

About Green Cross International (GCI)

Green Cross International is a leading environmental organisation that was founded by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993. GCI is a non-profit and non-governmental organization working to address the inter-connected global challenges of security, poverty and environmental degradation through a combination of high-level advocacy and local projects. GCI works in over 30 countries and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. For more information about GCI, visit www.gcint.org and follow GCI on twitter @GreenCrossInt and Facebook.

About the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA also ensures there is a framework within which each actor can contribute to the overall response effort. OCHA's mission is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors in order to alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies; advocate for the rights of people in need; promote preparedness and prevention; facilitate sustainable solutions

About the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The United Nations Environment Programme is the UN system's leading environmental agency. From Kosovo to Afghanistan, Lebanon, Sudan or China, UNEP has responded to crisis situations in more than 40 countries since 1999. Disasters and Conflicts is one of the organization's six priority areas of work. The Disasters and Conflicts sub-programme is comprised of four operational pillars: post-crisis environmental assessment, post-crisis environmental recovery, disaster risk reduction and environmental cooperation for peacebuilding. The Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB), based in Geneva, is tasked with coordinating the theme across UNEP. For more information see: <http://www.unep.org/conflictsanddisasters/>

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

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