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UN Announces Winners of Flagship Environment Award

Mexican President Felipe Calderon, Music Legend Angélique Kidjo and Adventurer Louis Palmer among Recipients

New York / Nairobi, 10 May 2011 – Mexican President Felipe Calderon, global music legend Angélique Kidjo and adventurer Louis Palmer are among the five winners of the 2011 *Champions of the Earth* awards, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced on Tuesday.

They received their awards at a ceremony hosted by UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, Gisele Bündchen, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, along with fellow laureates green entrepreneur Zhang Yue and scientist and campaigner Dr. Olga Speranskaya.

From using green technology to cut air pollution in China, to tackling the impact of toxic chemicals in Eastern Europe or crossing the globe to fly the flag for solar power, this year's award winners are environmental champions whose daily work, leadership and advocacy represent green innovation in action.

The full list of the 2011 *Champions of the Earth* is as follows:

- **Policy Leadership:** President Felipe Calderon (Mexico) for commitment to lead international efforts to combat climate change
- **Science and Innovation:** Dr. Olga Speranskaya (Russia) for successfully mobilizing civil society in eliminating obsolete pesticides and toxic chemicals in the former Soviet region.
- **Entrepreneurial Vision:** BROAD Group / Mr. Zhang Yue (China) for business leadership on energy efficiency and sustainable production.
- **Inspiration and Action:** Mr. Louis Palmer (Switzerland) for raising global awareness of the need for renewable energy and sustainable transport and Ms. Angélique Kidjo (Benin) for advocacy on social equity and women empowerment in support of sustainable development

"The 2011 Champions of the Earth winners are inspirational examples of how people from all walks of life are coming up with exciting, innovative solutions to environmental challenges. Whether through their business ventures, leadership, campaigning efforts or passion for technology, they are real examples of the global transition towards a more sustainable Green Economy", said UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

"As the world prepares for the UN Sustainable Development Conference in Rio de Janeiro next year, these five Champions of the Earth demonstrate how collective, positive action - from greener cars and air conditioning to tackling harmful pesticides or advocating for global action on carbon - can help tackle climate change and deliver environmental sustainability for communities and economies in all parts of the world", added Mr. Steiner.

The award ceremony followed a high-level policy dialogue, *Getting to Grips with the Green Economy*.

Featuring UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, Executive Coordinator of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), Elizabeth Thompson and Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico, Rafael Elvira Quesada, the event was an in-depth debate on the progress and challenges towards the global transition to a low-carbon, resource efficient Green Economy.

Moderated by TIME Magazine senior reporter Bryan Walsh, the interactive session explored different visions of the Green Economy in the developed and developing countries, the role of a Green Economy in eradicating poverty and how to calculate the cost of a transition towards a more sustainable global economic model.

The *Champions of the Earth* event ran parallel to the 19th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development at UN headquarters in New York. The Green Economy – along with international environmental governance reform – is one of two central pillars of the UN Sustainable Development Conference (Rio+20), to be held in Brazil next year.

Launched in 2005, Champions of the Earth is the UN's flagship environmental award. To date, it has recognised 46 individuals and organizations for their leadership, vision, inspiration and action on the environment.

The diverse list of previous *Champions* laureates include former US Vice President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore, Chinese actress and environmental advocate Zhou Xun, the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) and Dr. Atiq Rahman, an author and sustainable development expert from Bangladesh.

2011 Champions of the Earth – Winners Profiles:

President Felipe Calderon (Mexico)

President Calderon has been a strong voice for the environment on the world stage since his election in 2006.

He has been praised for his stewardship of international climate change negotiations – most recently as host of the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico, last year. The Cancun talks resulted in several new initiatives and institutions, including the strengthening of the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanisms and the creation of a Green Climate Fund, which will manage long-term finance mobilized to enable developing countries to address climate change.

“Confidence is back”, announced Calderon at the 3am conclusion of the climate talks, symbolising what was widely hailed as a significant step forward in climate negotiations after the disappointment of the Copenhagen conference in 2009.

Closer to home, President Calderon has made clear his ambition to make Mexico a world leader on climate action.

Under its Special Climate Change Program, Mexico will replace nearly 2 million refrigerators and air conditioners, and more than 47 million incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps or other more efficient lighting technologies, by 2012.

Mexico made the unilateral commitment through its Special Climate Change Program (PECC) to reduce 51 million tons of CO₂ by 2012 - the equivalent of all the GHG emissions generated by all the vehicles that circulate in Mexico City in four and a half years.

Mexico has also been a strong advocate of using forest resources to mitigate climate change. At present, the conservation of 2.4 million hectares of forest ecosystems incorporated in the Payment for Environmental Services Program is guaranteed. The Special Climate Change Program mitigation goal of incorporating 1.5 million hectares to the Payment for Environmental Services program, and thus preventing the release of 2.2 million tons of CO₂ or its equivalent into the atmosphere, has already been achieved.

Reforestation programmes in the country are set to add another three million hectares by 2012.

“If we can find a formula that allows us to simultaneously fight climate change and poverty, we will have cleared the path to be followed by humankind”, said President Calderón at the Champions of the Earth ceremony in New York. “That route exists and we must explore it together.”

Dr. Olga Speranskaya (Russia)

Russian scientist Dr. Olga Speranskaya has been garnering headlines worldwide for her work to reduce the harmful impact of toxic chemicals in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Many former Soviet countries are home to vast stockpiles of highly toxic obsolete pesticides. Exposure to such pollutants can seriously damage human health and the environment.

Dr. Speranskaya formed a civil society network that has grown to include NGO groups, governmental bodies and academics. Its aim is to work on phasing out obsolete pesticides and other chemicals. The campaign succeeded in pushing national governments to ratify the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which aims to eliminate the release of such products into the environment. Nine of twelve countries in the region ratified the Convention and now participate as full Parties at its global meetings. She has also led campaigns to ban the burial and transport of hazardous chemicals.

As co-chair of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), Dr. Speranskaya has helped NGOs implement more than 70 projects on toxic chemicals in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The NGOs have identified contaminated hotspots, analyzed the health impacts of POPs, developed proposals for mitigating these poisonous chemicals, and coordinated public participation in the identification of unauthorized storage and use of banned and obsolete chemicals.

“It feels great to be recognized by UNEP as a Champion of the Earth”, said Dr. Speranskaya. “It demonstrates how important the work that we do is and how people all over the world really recognize that chemical safety is a great challenge and one of the major problems that we now face.”

BROAD Group (China)

Zhang Xue – Chairman and Founder

“Responsibility is more important than growth”, runs one of the company mottos of China’s BROAD Group.

BROAD is a world leader in the manufacture of central air-conditioning systems that use diesel or natural gas instead of electricity to cool office buildings, shopping malls and factories. BROAD states that its non-electric air conditioning units are 200% more energy efficient and that CO2 emissions are four times lower than traditional models.

BROAD, which is based in Changsha, Hunan Province, was established by Zhang Xue with a mere US\$3,000 in 1988. Today, the company’s air conditioners are the market leader in China and BROAD exports its products to some 60 countries around the world.

As well as regularly featuring in lists of China's wealthiest people, founder Zhang Xue has become one of the most outspoken voices on the environment in China, advocating, among other things, for tighter government regulations on insulation and building standards.

BROAD prides itself on its green credentials and lists protecting the environment, energy conservation and reducing greenhouse gases among its key company goals.

Indeed, BROAD states that the cumulative effect of all its products sold to date has led to emissions savings of around 90 million tons of CO₂, 1 million tons of sulphur dioxide and 10,000 tons of CFCs.

BROAD has been a member of the United Nations Global Compact since 2001, and in 2008, the company joined the Climate Group - an independent, not-for-profit organization working internationally with government and business leaders to advance smart policies and technologies to cut global emissions and accelerate a clean industrial revolution.

"When I set up my business, I challenged myself to create wealth. Now, I have completely shifted the focus of this business towards the direction of reducing emissions. I've taken on the challenge of climate change", said Zhang Xue.

"With this award, people will start to notice our work and we will be able to influence them to pay more attention to energy efficiency, whether as an individual or as a business."

Louis Palmer (Switzerland)

Providing a green twist on Jules Verne's famous voyage, adventurer Louis Palmer successfully led a fleet of electric vehicles around the world in 80 days last year. In doing so, the "Zero Race" highlighted two of the major environmental challenges facing the world today - the need for more sustainable transport and cleaner energy supplies.

Teams from Australia, Germany, Switzerland and South Korea took part in the race, which followed a course across four continents, before ending at the United Nations in Geneva last January. With their sleek, modern design and high performance, the Zero Race vehicles embody the major advancements currently underway in the transport sector and how investment in green technology is a key component of tackling climate change.

The Zero Race is only the latest chapter in Palmer's adventurous career. In 2004, with the help of four Swiss universities, he built the 'Solartaxi' and became the first person to circumnavigate the globe in a solar-powered vehicle. Traveling through 38 countries, Palmer reached an audience of millions with his solar showcase for efficient, sustainable transportation.

Palmer's work continues to deliver a simple, powerful environmental message across the world: that modern solutions to global warming are available, affordable and ready.

"I feel absolutely great to be recognized as a UNEP Champion of the Earth", said Louis Palmer. "So many people helped me and along the way and we all feel honored that we get this recognition. This change to renewable energies has to happen and really it motivates not only me but my whole team."

Angélique Kidjo (Benin)

A voice loved by thousands of fans around the world, singer-songwriter Angélique Kidjo is also a powerful voice for humanitarian and environmental change. Described by Time Magazine as "Africa's premier diva", Benin-born Kidjo uses her celebrity status to speak out in support of a number of important causes, particularly girls' education and sustainable development.

Kidjo established The Batonga Foundation in 2009, which provides scholarships, school supplies and mentoring programmes and raises community awareness of the value of education for girls in Africa.

Kidjo was raised in both the voodoo tradition and Catholic faith, and speaks of how her childhood taught her respect for nature. As part of her advocacy work on the environment and sustainable development, Kidjo recorded a video for UNEP's 'Seal the Deal' campaign, encouraging world leaders to produce a binding agreement on cutting carbon emissions and tackling climate change.

In 2010, Kidjo was appointed as a Patron for the UN Music & Environment Initiative. Led by the UNEP in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other partners, the initiative aims to leverage the power of music to address some of the most pressing environmental problems facing the planet.

"Any time I can spare from my family, my music, to go around the world and work with different kinds of people, that are struggling everyday to make their lives better and other peoples better, I will do so, because otherwise why am I here?" said Kidjo.

"My life will be useless, if I do not share my talent, my skill and my spirit. I'm not made to live alone, I'm made to live with other people on this planet."

For more information, please contact:

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