

UNEP

PEACE CHILD INTERNATIONAL

Environmental Crisis As Seen By World Youth:

"Don't Treat Earth As Poorly As Parents Have"

***Pachamama, Our Earth, Our Future*, is launched as educational guide for youth to environmental problems, solutions**

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Klaus Toepfer, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme, David Woollcombe, Director, Peace Child International, and Cecilia Weckstrom, youth contributor, Pachamama, and young editors and contributors from around the world will be available for interviews Thursday, October 21, Friday, October 22 and Monday, October 25. Please call 416-538-8712 to schedule an interview.

The Earth's condition is deteriorating in nearly every category, ranging from the water we drink, the air we breathe and the oceans and forests that sustain all life, according to a book by and for youth about the global environment.

Pachamama: Our Earth, Our Future, is a special youth edition of UNEP's ***Global Environment Outlook 2000***. Created as a global environmental primer for 11 to 14 year olds, the book will be launched October 26.

Pachamama (a word meaning Mother Earth in the Inca culture) is the product of youth editors, designers and hundreds of young contributors worldwide, with the support of UNEP and Peace Child International. UNESCO and UNICEF were also project partners.

The book's young editors warn readers that, if they behave as recklessly as their parents, "the good ship Planet Earth will crash sometime in the not too distant future.

"We don't have an environmental problem," they add. "We have social, economic and political problems that greatly affect our environment."

The 96-page book contains information, case studies, games, and topics for classroom discussion of major environmental issues, ranging from atmospheric and freshwater problems to urbanization and the protection of polar areas. It is complemented by two companion publications, a teacher's guide and suggestions to youth for taking action -- including a "how-to" guide for reaching political leaders.

UNEP's original Global Environment Outlook 2000, released in September, 1999, took 2½ years to complete and offers a comprehensive assessment of the state of the planet, based on input from 850 international contributors. It identifies policy deficiencies and recommends actions needed in each world region.

In its organization and essential messages about the world's environmental situation and prospects, *Pachamama* follows UNEP's authoritative GEO-2000 report, but presents the interpretation of young people through their poignant artwork, poetry and prose.

The youth contributors also often add their own biting commentary. Describing the 1984 Bhopal disaster, which led to 2,500 deaths and 350,000 illnesses, teenager Neha Smritt of India writes: "The accident was bad (but) what happened afterwards was almost worse: Union Carbide has never admitted responsibility for the disaster and has not apologized to its victims. They have paid minimal compensation to those who lost loved ones and have done little to provide medical care to the 50,000 or so who still suffer... Governments need to be tougher on companies like Union Carbide."

Millennium Young People's Congress

The official launch of *Pachamama* is slated for the Millennium Young People's Congress, Hawaii, Oct. 26. Some 500 young people from around the world will convene Oct. 25 to 29 to focus global attention on priorities for the new millennium.

In a survey of 10,000 youth conducted during preparations for the book, the environment and associated problems were most often cited as Earth's most pressing priority, followed by human rights, education, peace and health. Environmental concerns ranked among the top four youth priorities in 44 countries, including the U.K., Japan, U.S., Canada, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, South Africa, Uganda, Jordan, Kuwait, Norway, Belgium, Finland, Spain, Ukraine, Belarus, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Australia.

Top Environmental Trends

In a section entitled "What Scientists Say," *Pachamama* looks into the future and presents the consensus of 200 international experts (canvassed by UNEP for GEO-2000) who put climate

change and freshwater scarcity at the top of a 24-point list of key 21st Century environmental issues.

Juxtaposed with the scientific consensus is the collective view of 10,000 youth surveyed during *Pachamama's* preparation, who say the world's top 10 positive and negative emerging environmental issues and trends are:

Top 10 negative trends:

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Top 10 positive emerging trends:

- Increased recycling
- More reforestation
- Greater animal protection
- More use of solar energy
- Water conservation
- Higher environmental awareness
- More measures against pollution
- More power to NGOs
- More natural food products
- More protection of rainforests

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Increased pollution

- More deforestation
- Intensified hunting of animals
- More air pollution
- Widening ozone hole
- Worse water pollution
- Water scarcity
- More toxic waste
- Over-population
- Increased amounts of rubbish

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, calls *Pachamama* " an inspired, sometimes frightening collection of case studies, poems and drawings to tell the story of our global environment.

"Some things (youth) have to say are disturbing -- adults have acted irresponsibly in caring for the environment. But young people are also enthusiastically dedicated to their future -- a future where Mother Earth is healthy and where people work together to solve our current and future problems."

UNEP Director's three-point challenge to youth

Dr. Toepfer offers youth readers a three-point challenge, urging them to:

- "Talk about the problems that you see in your own environment with your friends, family and teachers;
- "Make an action plan on how you can improve your environment in the new millennium -- and write me in 12 months telling me the difference that you have made;
- "Challenge yourself and your leaders to bring the concept of sustainable development, especially environmental and social justice, to the center of local, national and international decision-making."

Said David Woolcombe, Director, Peace Child International: "Making *Pachamama* was a wonderful experience of partnership between young people and UN Environment Programme experts. The young people had very strong ideas about the shape and title of the book, and UNEP was determined that their book should achieve the same standards of accuracy as the GEO 2000 original. It worked! UNEP accepted the young people's unusual title, and the young people accepted all UNEP's detailed corrections to the text and both groups are delighted with the result."

Cecilia Weckstrom of London, 23-year-old designer of *Pachamama*, said producing the book involved recruitment of hundreds of groups around the world to read and summarize the original GEO-2000. "The hardest part was choosing from thousands of contributions," she said. "We could have made 10 books!

"This book was a joy to work on; in both editorial meetings, there was an abundance of talent in writing, illustrating and environmental action. The individuals from all over the world melded very quickly into an excellent working team."

Preparation of the book was funded by the UN Foundation for International Partnerships. It retails for £7.99 and may be ordered from U.K. publisher Evans Brothers Ltd., 2A Portman Mansions, Chiltern St., London W1M 1LE; T: +44-171-935-7160.

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