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Environmental Awards Celebrate Grassroots Action

SAN FRANCISCO, California, April 14, 2003 (ENS) - Seven environmental activists who have led important grassroots efforts to protect the environment and public health were honored today in San Francisco with the 14th annual Goldman Environmental Prize. The seven recipients offer a diverse view of the world's environmental problems and the faces of those determined to solve them.

The awards are given annually to grassroots environmentalists from six geographic areas: Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands and Island Nations, North America, and South and Central America. Each winner also receives a \$125,000 prize.

"This year's winners have looked beyond themselves, often risking freedom or safety, to inspire their communities to fight for environmental protections," said Richard Goldman, founder of the Goldman Environmental Prize.

This year's winner from Africa is forest protection activist Odigha Odigha, who is leading the campaign against industrial logging in the rainforests of Cross River State in southeastern Nigeria.

The forests Odigha is working to protect are Nigeria's last remaining rainforests and are home to 2,400 native forest communities with some 1.5 million people, the highest primate diversity on Earth and an estimated 20 percent of the world's butterfly species. Some 95 percent of Nigeria's rainforests have already been lost.

Odigha Odigha is a leading activist fighting for protection and sustainable development in Nigeria's remaining rainforests. (Photo by Mieke Kramer courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)



Odigha's efforts helped create a statewide logging moratorium and he has educated hundreds of forest communities on sustainable forestry practices. His proposal for Nigeria's first Forestry Commission's mandate and structure has helped get civil society and forest community representation into his nation's forest management practices.

His success and fame have brought Odigha trouble - for several years he was forced to hide from government

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officials, some of whom had threatened his life. The end of the repressive Abacha government in 1998 allowed Odigha to become more public with his activism and in 2001 he helped form the U.S. based West Africa Forest Network. This organization has helped to put international pressure for forest protection on the Nigerian government and on the companies intent on logging the forests.

The 2003 prize recipient from Asia is Von Hernandez of the Philippines. A former Greenpeace activist, Hernandez organized campaigns against waste incinerators in the Philippines, resulting in the world's first nationwide ban on waste incinerators.



Von Hernandez has become an international advocate for tighter regulation of waste incineration. (Photo by Richard Roll courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)

Hernandez's activism has extended onto the world stage. At last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, he helped organize a "zero waste" forum that drew more than 100 environmental leaders from 20 nations.

Hernandez also play a large role in organizing the first "Global Day of Action Against Waste Incineration" which involved more than 125 organizations from 54 countries.

"Our fight against incineration, landfills and polluting technologies is actually a struggle against the negative and destructive forces of overconsumption and dirty industrial development," said Hernandez. "It is essentially a struggle to shift the dominant paradigm to one which is truly respectful of life and the rights of future generations."

Peru's Maria Elena Foronda Farro is the award winner for Central and South America. The co founder of the environmental organization Natura in Chimbote, Peru, is being honored for spearheading a community driven campaign to clean up Peru's fishmeal industry, which is responsible for some of the worst pollution affecting Peru's coastal cities.

Maria Elena Foronda spent 17 months in jail for her environmental activism. (Photo by Richard Goldgewicht courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)

Peru is the world's largest fishmeal producer and 70 percent of the factories are located in



residential neighborhoods. The mixing of industrial and residential waste causes major health problems for the residents of Chimbote, which is the third most contaminated city in Peru. In addition, the fishing industry continues a host of environmentally destructive practices and is severely degrading the local marine environment.

Foronda has faced threats and was forced to spend 17 months in jail because of false allegations she and her husband were members of the Shining Path terrorist organization. Her work has prompted eight Peruvian fishmeal factories to become better stewards of the environment and she continues the difficult struggle of fighting for the environmental and public health of Chimbote.

The prize for Europe will be awarded this year to Spain's Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, who orchestrated the campaign to stop Spain's National Hydrological Plan from damming and rerouting the country's last remaining freeflowing rivers.

A physicist and economics professor, Arrojo rallied 400,000 people to march in the streets of Barcelona to protest the water plan. He mobilized hundreds of thousands at similar protests in Madrid and Valencia, and co founded the nonprofit Iberian Congress on Water Planning and Management and the Foundation for a New Culture of Water.



Pedro Arrojo-Aguda has mobilized Spaniards to protest the country's water conservation policies.
(Photo by Robert Roll courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)

Arrojo is battling for more sustainable and sensible water policy within Spain and within the European Union, which is expected to finance some \$17 billion, which is 40 percent, of the plan. He is credited with having help kick start a new European water conservation movement that is often referred to as the "New Water Culture."

Two aboriginal elders from Australia are sharing this year's prize for the Island and Island Nations region. Eileen Kampakuta Brown and Eileen Wani Wingfield are being honored for their efforts to block construction of a nuclear waste dump in their South Australian desert homeland.

The British and Australian governments have historically used this area of the country for a host of conventional and nuclear weapons testing, and a slew of uranium mines have also impacted the natives and the local environment.

Aboriginal elders Eileen Kampakuta Brown and



**Eileen Wani Wingfield
are standing up against a nuclear waste dump on their native
lands.** (Photo by Robert Roll courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)

But these two seventy year old residents have rallied support against this latest plan. In 1995, they enlisted other elder women and formed the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta - Cooper Pedy Women's Council — or Kungka Tjuta, to stop the nuclear waste dump and protect their land and culture.

In particular, they have raised warnings about the risk of groundwater contamination from the waste dump, the effects of which could be devastating for desert communities.

The duo have reached out to politicians and the general public through the Irati Wanti campaign, which urges the government to leave its poison where it is. Some 87 percent of South Australians polled are now against the government's plan, but the government has not yet budged on its position.

Julie Bonds, this year's winner for North America, is a coal miner's daughter and a former Pizza Hut waitress who became a full time activist after her grandson asked her why a local stream was full of dead fish. Through her activism, Bonds has emerged as a leader in the fight to stop mountaintop removal coal mining throughout the Appalachians.

The issue has a distinctly local feel for Bonds - in 2001, she and her family became the last residents to evacuate from her hometown of Marfork Hollow, West Virginia because the town has been destroyed by mountaintop removal mining. This method of mining involves blasting the top of the mountain in order to tap huge seams of coal, but it causes massive erosion and flooding that damages streams and forests.

A recent court ruling that removed a federal ban on mountaintop removal is a serious threat to the region, but Bonds continues to motivate a growing grassroots effort that is determined to protect the area's environment and the public health of its citizens.

“When powerful people pursue profits at the expense of human rights and our environment, they have failed as leaders,” Bonds has said. “Responsible citizens must step forward, not just to point the way, but to lead the way to a better world.”



Julia Bonds continues to fight against mountaintop removal mining, which devastated her hometown in West Virginia. (Photo by Robert Gates courtesy Goldman Environmental Prize)

The Goldman

Environmental Prize was created in 1990 by Richard Goldman and his late wife Rhoda Goldman. The winners are selected by an international jury from confidential nominations submitted by a worldwide network of environmental organizations and individuals.

"In the current political climate, it is more important than ever to recognize people who are working to protect the health of their water, air and community resources," Goldman said. "We are honored to recognize work that exemplifies how much can be accomplished when ordinary people take extraordinary action to protect the health of our planet."

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