

UN Ambassador Edward Norton calls for people power to protect biodiversity



Edward Norton

22 September 2010 – Individuals can use their wallets, their Internet skills and their lawmakers to press corporations and governments to take meaningful measures to preserve biodiversity, the United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and acclaimed actor Edward Norton said today, urging the public to play a bigger role in stopping the decline in the number of plant and animal species worldwide.

Mr. Norton – who was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity in July – told the UN News Centre that it is not only world leaders and policy-makers who can play a part in protecting the planet.

Consumers can vote with their dollars and only buy products that are environmentally friendly, he said, noting that many companies had started to introduce “greener” brand lines to meet demand.

“Growth in the environmentally friendly sector of consumer products is really high – not just in organics, but also in cleaner products,” he said. “I think that companies that ignore these trends are probably ignoring them at the peril of their bottom line.”

Mr. Norton noted that many green products are no longer substantially more expensive than their standard rivals.

“In some cases, there still is that cost premium, but in many cases the products that don’t carry a downstream environmental burden are becoming price competitive.”

The Goodwill Ambassador noted that the public can also pressure their legislators to ensure their country signs the Convention on Biodiversity or pass appropriate laws on the issue, such as better regulating environmentally destructive industry.

“I think it is being persuasively demonstrated all over the world in various scenarios of all different scales that you can achieve economic development that does not rely on the destruction of ecosystems.”

Mr. Norton and several partners have recently developed Crowdrise, a website that allows the public to use a social networking platform to help raise funds for charitable causes.

“We implemented Crowdrise with the idea that people are looking for tools of empowerment so that they can get around what feel like the over-large edifices surrounding an issue and get directly to some of the people in small groups that are taking the initiative and support them.”

The world is more interconnected than ever, Mr. Norton stressed.

“It’s not that hard to surf around [the Internet] any more and find examples of groups that are doing things at a scale where your small contribution or your small ability to do a little bit of fund-raising can really make a difference.”

He added that he was optimistic that policy-makers were becoming more aware of the importance of protecting biodiversity, its impact of human health, and on the fact that taking a green stand does not necessarily have to mean a large economic cost to industry or the public.

“Unsustainable development is no longer an option, and environmental preservation that doesn’t deal with human needs is no longer an option either.”

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