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## **UN-led campaign that planted 12 billion trees worldwide starts new phase**



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A United Nations campaign that has overseen the planting of more than 12 billion trees around the world has been handed over to a youth-led environmental organization based in Germany that will build on the initiative’s achievements over the past four years.

“More than 12 billion trees have been planted by people from all walks of life – schoolchildren to presidents – testament to a growing global movement for sustainability,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his remarks marking the [handover](#) of the [campaign](#).

“As we look to the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development and beyond, we will need just this kind of commitment if we are to guarantee that our planet can continue to provide the foundation we need to reduce poverty and improve security and opportunity for all,” he added.

Inspired by the work of the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai and her Green Belt Movement, the Billion Tree Campaign was created by the UN Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)) in 2006 and quickly surpassed its initial goal of planting one billion trees in just a few months, reaching the 12 billion landmark in October.

The campaign counted with the participation of 193 countries with China currently in the lead, having planted a total of 2.8 billion trees since 2004. India holds second place with 2.1 billion trees, followed by Ethiopia, Mexico and Turkey.

According to a news release issued by UNEP, the agency had always seen the campaign as a finite project and decided to transfer it to a partner rather than close it.

The campaign was handed over to the youth-oriented Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation yesterday during a ceremony held at the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa.

“The Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation’s profile, with its emphasis on young people, its academies on climate change and its existing commitment and involvement in the Billion Tree Campaign, gave it the right profile with which to allow the campaign to continue as a supportive element in a wider youth initiative,” said UNEP in a statement.

“I congratulate all who have participated in the Billion Tree Campaign and on its achievements to date,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “Each time we set a target and each time we thought it was time to bring the campaign to an end, more and more trees came forward and the bar was set even higher.

“Today we open a new chapter with the Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation and its network of enthusiastic young people around the globe,” he added.

Deforestation has been a key issue during the Climate Change Conference this week, with [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon calling on countries yesterday to throw their support behind the UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), which seeks to create financial value for the carbon stored in forests, offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions and invest in low-carbon technologies to sustainable development.

The benefits of the REDD+ initiative were also discussed today at a side event of the conference, with more developing countries partnering with developed nations to reduce emissions from forests.

Indonesia, for example, revealed plans to utilize around \$1 billion of funding from Norway under the REDD+ programme.

“Countries ranging from Indonesia to Brazil and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are recognizing that REDD+ investments can offer myriad opportunities to boost green development in the 21st century – through optimizing and enhancing ecosystem services, tackling climate change, improving water security or promoting green jobs,” said Mr. Steiner.

“Mobilizing more partnerships such as that between Norway and Indonesia, or private sector funding is vital if the full potential of forests to contribute to a green economy is to be realized,” he added.

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