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## **UN wraps up year of forests by highlighting their social and economic value**



UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat Director Jan McAlpine. Photo: UNFF

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The United Nations today wrapped up its year-long campaign to raise awareness on the importance of forests and the people who depend on them with a series of events that spotlight their role and impact in socio-economic activities.

“Each of us, all seven billion people on Earth, has our physical, economic and spiritual health tied to forests,” said Jan McAlpine, Director of the UN Forum on Forests ([UNFF](#)) Secretariat.

Throughout 2011, the UN organized a series of events and activities to highlight the value of forests and the actions that people can take to protect them and help contribute to their sustainable management.

At today's closing ceremony for the year, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang stressed that the International Year of Forests "helped create a platform for dialogue and action.

"Through various actors – starting with local communities and moving to national, regional and international levels – we heard about effective ways to sustainably manage forests," he said. "We hope that the year inspired governments to redouble their efforts as well."

According to the UN Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)), forests cover 31 per cent of the world's total global land area, store more than one trillion tons of carbon and provide livelihoods for more than 1.6 billion people. However, deforestation accounts for 12 to 20 per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

To mark the conclusion of the campaign, a special ceremony was held at UN Headquarters in New York today honouring people who have made special contributions to protect forests.

"We launched the UNFF Forest Heroes Awards for the International Year of Forests 2011 to identify and honour the countless individuals around the world who are dedicating their lives to nurturing forests in quiet and heroic ways. The programme aims to spotlight everyday people working to make positive changes for forests," Ms. McAlpine told a press conference this afternoon, stressing that the response to the campaign had been very positive throughout all the regions that participated.

The winners of the awards come from various countries and backgrounds, but they all have made a significant impact on the preservation of forests.

Eleven-year-old girl scouts Rhiannon Tomtishen and Madison Vorva, for example, won the award for the North American region for convincing the Girl Scout Organization to stop using cookies containing palm oil, which is linked to the destruction of rainforests.

An oyster fisherman, Shigeatsu Hatakeyama, received the award for the Asia region, for his implementation of sustainable farming practices in Miyagi, Japan, which played a critical role in maintaining clean water for his oyster beds.

Nzegha Mzeka, 77, will be honoured for his work which has helped 30 communities in Cameroon to protect their watersheds and conserve community forests through sustainable bee farming, education and reforestation.

For the European region, Anatoly Lebedev will be honoured for his work campaigning against illegal logging and destructive land practices in Russia that threatened indigenous communities and Siberian tigers.

Paulo Adario will receive the award for Latin America for his dedication to the protection of rainforests and forest-dependent communities in the Brazilian Amazon despite death threats and warring interest groups.

The jury also decided to add a special award in recognition of the deceased couple José Claudio Ribeiro and Maria do Espírito Santo, two activists murdered in Brazil while trying to protect their natural forests.

In addition to the presentation of Forest Heroes Awards, the ceremony will feature the winners of the 2011 Universal Postal Union ([UPU](#)) letter-writing contest, which drew entries from more than two million children and youth worldwide, and the announcement of the winners of the 2011 children's art contest "Celebrate the Forests."

There will also be film clips from the first-ever award-winning International Forest Film Festival, as well as the launch of the commemorative book *Forests for People*, with 75 articles from 35 countries.

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