



Focus

Energy Globe Awards - small projects making a big difference

Small projects that can save and renew energy were honoured at the annual Energy Globe Awards held in Parliament's hemicycle chamber on 11 April. Here in this focus you can read about the winners of each category as well as interviews with some of the celebrities that took part in the awards - from US actor Martin Sheen to economist and energy specialist Jeremy Rifkin.

It was the first time they had been held in the Parliament and the event was an opportunity to put efforts to curb global warming through energy efficiency in the spotlight.

Energy Globe Award 2007: Kenyan solar project honoured

A prize giving in the European Parliament on Wednesday 11 April brought together politicians and celebrities gather for the annual Energy Globe Award. The prize rewards outstanding projects in the field of energy efficiency. This year's overall winner was John Maina from Kenya, who pioneered ways of increasing harvests of small farmers by 50% using solar power. In total 732 projects from 96 countries entered. The evening also featured music from Bee Gee Robin Gibb and violinist Nigel Kennedy.

John Maina's award was recognition of his development of a type of solar energy oven which allows fruit and vegetables to be dried (and thereby preserved). This has allowed farmers to increase yields without using either more water or pesticides. Speaking about his reward he said later that "the skills can be transferred at a local level".

The award ceremony was attended by a number of celebrities, each representing a continent. They included US actor Martin Sheen, singer Robin Gibb, Indian environmentalist Maneka Gandhi and the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering.

The glitz and the glamour of the evening did not detract from a more serious and sombre message about the environmental emergency faced by the world. As EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering, Energy Globe's host for the day, pointed out: "it's two minutes to midnight and we have to act" .

The entries were submitted in the categories Earth, Fire, Water, Air and Youth. In these categories the winners were:

Fire: solar homes in India

The UNEP Risoe Center and the Risoe National Laboratory Denmark for launching a four-year plan to establish over 16000 solar homes in India with Danish support and local Indian funding. Presenting the award, actor Martin Sheen, best known for his role as a US President in the "West Wing", raised a cheer by joking that had he been the real President we would have signed the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.

Water: waste water

Jerry M. Brownstein from the US won this category for developing waste water treatment using water filters made of recycled plastics that cleans it allowing it to be drunk. The filter can absorb up to 100% of oil contained in polluted water. The award was presented by violinist Nigel Kennedy, who took the opportunity to draw attention to huge disparities in the distribution of wealth in the world.

Air: plants that soak up CO2 emissions

In this category Reindert Augustijn won the award for inventing small Biogas plants for local communities in Vietnam. The installed plants help to reduce annual CO2 emissions. Presenting the award, Parliament's President Pöttering said that "EU and the EP have a leading role...but we have to cooperate with the US, India and China - we must work together".

Youth: self sufficient solar house

The University of Art in Linz in Austria won this for inventing a new self-sufficient solar house in South Africa, which is able to provide a constant indoor temperature level of 20 degrees Celsius independently from outdoor temperature.

Reaction after the awards

Following the event President Hans-Gert Pöttering commented that " it was a wonderful evening, there was a feeling of togetherness. I was mostly impressed by the humanity of the winners. Everyone who took part radiated great optimism. This shows that we can solve problems if we really want to - the positive attitude shows that we can do it".

One of the key supporters of the event, Paul Rübig of the European People's Party said that "the Parliament proved that it is at the living edge of what is happening in the world. We proved to the globe that we are able to master the future. The projects give us the courage for a better and safer future".

Robin Gibb said that "it produces a positive effect, I'm just proud to be part of it; it's an ongoing thing, a part of a massive jigsaw".

Actor Martin Sheen at the EP: "We have to wake up"

American actor and environmental campaigner Martin Sheen was in the European Parliament yesterday, 11 April, to take part in the Energy Globe Awards ceremony at which green energy projects from across the world will be recognised at a gala prize-giving event. Mr Sheen took a moment to answer our questions about his commitment to the fight against global warming and worldwide environmental degradation. He did not mince his words on the need for his own country to do more.

What made you come to the EP to participate in the Energy Globe Awards?

I think this Award gives the ordinary citizen and NGOs who have no voice and no access to this kind of media or attention, the chance to show us the things which are necessary for all of us. It's fascinating that it's third world countries which are making the greatest contributions, because they seem to suffer the most from lack of clean air, lack of clean water, and access to big business or profits from the environment. This event really focuses on the little guys, and that's what makes it so valuable.

Why do you campaign against environmental destruction?

I'm a concerned citizen and I believe that having offspring makes us hostages for the future. My children, my children's children and their children will inherit what we have given them and what we are giving them is not very good. So as a steward of the Earth, I have to accept the responsibility to do all that I can, for as long as I can, to awaken whoever will listen to what's coming down, and get people to join the fight for the environment.

What position does America have towards climate change?

We have to wake up! The only thing we lack in America is leadership, which is the most important thing. We have enough people who are concerned and active citizens, but we do not have the support of the government. This administration has been lacking; it's very upsetting and very discouraging. We can only hope they're gonna to wake up before it's too late. We're not anticipating anything from this administration; but maybe the next one. Public opinion in America is starting to wake up, no thanks to this administration, but thanks to the environmentalists in America who are taking the leadership.

Can Europe and the USA work together on controlling climate change?

They absolutely must! We're part of the same world, we can not separate ourselves. Europeans are far more aware and Europe is doing far more than we are. So I hope we'll catch up with you very soon; but we need a new administration in Washington to do that!

Forecasts about climate change are dire and much damage is already done: is it too late?

Oh no! Of course many people, even those with scientific opinions, say that it's too late, that we have reached the point of no return. I personally do not believe that: I think we are capable of making it better, of repairing what has been destroyed.

Europeans often characterize Americans as wanton consumers of energy, drivers of gas-guzzlers: is this fair?

Yes, definitively. I think we're over privileged: we have a lot, we use and we waste a lot, and we don't think about the needs and concerns of anyone else. We have to begin to focus on the needs of the third world now. We think of the third world as the child of a lesser god, and it has no relation to us. But we have to wake up and understand that we all breathe the same air, our children inherit the same future.

If you had a magic wand so you could make one practical change to affect climate change, what would it be?

I would start with water. I think the fresh water issue is the main issue: the lack of clean water is one of the greatest environmental dangers we have to face now. It is the centre of most of the health problems in the

third world. It causes so many diseases and destroys the hopes of so many children in so many of these countries. Hydrology is the energy of the future

Maneka Gandhi - Chair of the Energy Globe Jury

Member of the Indian Congress and a former environment minister, Maneka Gandhi is an outspoken animal rights activist who has written several books on law and animal welfare. Born in 1956 she is a part - albeit an estranged one - of the Gandhi dynasty that has ruled India for much of the time since Independence. She was the Chair of the Energy Globe Jury.

Speaking to the media at the Parliament Maneka Gandhi voiced the hope that the "the Award will help governments to reconsider their ways". She also noted a great sense of "despondency" in Asia - especially in the smaller countries as they will be some of the hardest hit by the effects of global warming.

Is it too late to act?

"I don't believe it's the end of the end, but that we're close to it", she said. "People don't see climate change happening to them when we talk about how the world will look like in 25-40 years, but obviously it is happening day by day".

"Climate change is not anymore the fault of the Americans, nor Europeans, India has its responsibility too". Everyone, said Mrs Gandhi, seems to share the urge for what she called the "McDonaldification of their dreams", but stressed that the US cannot use India as an excuse for not moving forward. "Any conditionality by the US towards India and China will only make them do worse".

What can India do?

Arguing that India cannot think in terms of reducing its emissions, she gave statistics on the per capita energy consumption in India vs. developed countries. Whereas in India per capita energy consumption in 2005 was equivalent to 520 kg of oil, the world average was 1731 and European average as high as 4842. "In India, 57 % of rural households, and 12% in urban areas, some 84 million altogether, do not have electricity at all" said Mrs Gandhi.

What role can the European Parliament play?

"Asia and India look a lot towards Europe and pinch their laws. It has a very strong psychological effect. If the Parliament makes the right laws, we will make them too. It's not an excuse, but..."

On nuclear energy Mrs Gandhi said she was personally not in favour "simply because we will not achieve the regulatory standards. Nuclear is too sophisticated for India, we cannot handle it. It's premature. Our first issue is how to get energy to our 800 000 villages".

Later she stressed the need for India to focus on alternative decentralised energy sources (solar, wind, small hydroplants) as it could help the country to avoid a lot of the CO2 problems. Concerned that the renewables provide only 2% of the global energy mix, she called also upon the developed countries to do their share.

Explaining that 40 % of the electricity was lost in the distribution phase, she underlined the need to focus on improving energy efficiency, also by means of taxation. "It's very important to tackle the climate and energy challenge in a non-coal based way. In Asian countries, environment and energy consumption ministries have very limited powers and budgets and are seen rather as a nuisance for industrialisation".

You said that people in India don't realise climate change is happening now. What is the Government doing to raise awareness?

"The Government does nothing to raise awareness. It has left it purely up to NGOs to do. Our government doesn't even have a research cell. The NGOs do their best, but it is not enough. It has to be government business. In India the stumbling block is not so much the people, but politicians. People are not given an

opportunity to get educated. Political will is lacking across the board".

What do you do in your daily life?

"I'll try to do my best but it's not enough", said Mrs Gandhi who has 25 hospitals, 5 orphanages. She travels around the world to raise awareness of environmental issues, writes columns for 25 newspapers and has initiated some environmental law in India.

Jeremy Rifkin at the EP: "Polar bears are already drowning"

International energy economist Jeremy Rifkin - author of "The European Dream" used his attendance at the European Parliament to warn of the effects of catastrophic climate change. He was speaking ahead of the Energy Globe Awards held in Parliament on Wednesday 11 April. He warned of "real-time" global warming with melting arctic ice and hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico - events that he said scientists had predicted for the 22nd century.

Speaking to the Parliament's website and other media organisations he warned of the consequences for the planet of a 3 degree rise in global temperatures. He said it could lead to the extinction of one-third of all species on the planet and take it back to a state it existed 3000 years ago. "We cannot escape - we have nowhere to go apart from our planet" he said.

How can we move towards more renewable fuel?

"Hydrogen is critical as it concerns the way you store renewable energy. You know the sun isn't always shining, the wind isn't always blowing, and water tables could be down on the dams. So the time when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing...you take some of the electricity you generate and store it in the form of hydrogen. You electrolyse water with electricity, grab the hydrogen. That's the way you store renewable energy...so you can get energy for the power grid and for transport. We have to get to renewable energies and get rid of the old energies, coal, oil, gas and uranium - they're in their sunsets - renewable energies are in the sunrise".

"What does the average American know about global warming"?

"I'd say the average American is doing a quick step as it wasn't previously on the radar screen. Here in Europe there is increased awareness of climate change across the 27 countries, across the public citizens of this continent. The citizens here in Europe are not only aware of climate change, but they are actually willing to make some sacrifices and risk some new ideas to get to renewable energy. European is far advanced; it's the laboratory for the new energy era.

In the US climate change has been at the lowest level of concern of all the issues, but, that's changed with the recent hurricanes - 'Katrina' and 'Rita' and there's now real time global warming effects - the ski areas are losing snow, the central valley in California is facing more serious drought. People are becoming aware that climate change is affecting their communities and their way of life".

"What do you do personally to save the environment?"

"I have a car that's 7 years old and it only has 24, 000 miles on it. I try not to drive too much - but I'm not Mother Theresa, there's a lot more things I could do. One thing we do in our house is that we're vegetarian. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation just put out a report - that was ignored. It turns out that the number one cause of human induced climate change is not transport - its livestock production. Even though there is less CO2 there's methane and nitrous oxide and these are potent gases. The UN said we are increasing our meat production which is increasing CO2, methane and nitrous oxide emissions.

We have not yet had a discussion on reducing our addiction to meat, so if we talk about reducing our addiction to gasoline we must reduce our addiction to meat".

In 2002 Jeremy Rifkin wrote a book entitled "The Hydrogen economy" which advocated the use of CO2 free hydrogen as a way of replacing traditional fossil fuels as a form of "forever fuel". In 2004 he wrote his best-seller "The European Dream" in which he said that while the American Dream is "languishing" - Europe enjoys longer life spans with less poverty and crime than the US.

Bee Gee Robin Gibb

One of the guests at the Global Energy award was Robin Gibb, member of the legendary pop group the Bee Gees. Before presenting the prize in the "Youth", he performed live in the plenary hemicycle the Bee Gees hit "How deep is your love?" At the end of the show he and violinist Nigel Kennedy performed "Words". Later, our editors grabbed a moment to ask him a few questions.

What can an individual do to change the course of the world?

"One person can change the way many people think. Sometimes one voice can be enough to break others out of their mindsets, that there's nothing they can do".

You presented the best youth project today. How important is it to bring the issue to the younger generation?

"It is very important to get young people involved, because they are the society tomorrow. Getting them as early as possible is what counts. That is my mission: to get young people involved".

Do you see yourself as a role model?

"I like to see myself as a role model. I like to be a particle, a beginning for change, a source for inspiration".

Can music be a power for a new industrial revolution towards cleaner energy?

"Music can move a lot, but it is not enough. People have to remember the message and then live with it. But they should make sure they hold onto the message. And here I am talking especially again about young people. The young people are the future".

Have you ever performed in a Parliament before?

"Yes, in Moscow"

How did you enjoy performing in the European Parliament?

"Great, it was very nice. I liked the event. It produces a positive effect, I'm proud to be part of it; it's an ongoing thing, a part of a massive jigsaw".