



## 2004 Goldman Awards

By Elizabeth Arzouni, Earthscope Reporter

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Bay Area youth filled the fourth balcony of the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco on Monday, April 29 to honor this year's recipients of the largest grassroots environmental activism award. Through a concerted effort to empower young environmental leaders, approximately 300 youth from 34 environmental youth groups received complimentary tickets to the 15th Annual Goldman Environmental Prize Ceremony. This year, there were 7 winners of the Prize, which awards hard-earned recognition and \$125,000 to environmental heroes from 6 continental regions each year.

Though perched far from the stage, the youth felt captivated by the award recipients and their stories. Many youth, like Friends of the Urban Forest's Rico Dickens, were motivated after the event.

"There are a lot of people around the world trying to make a difference. I'm excited to be part of this and to make my own contribution," he said.

Eric Miao, who works to improve air quality in Bay View Hunters Point with Literacy for Environmental Justice, also took the speeches of the speakers and recipients to heart.

"I'll take home inspirational words. And to be able to see the people gives me an image, it gives me a stronger impression of what I can do." In turn, many of the speakers and recipients acknowledged the importance of youth in the effort to increase global environmental sustainability and justice.

Libia Grueso, one recipient of the Goldman Award, acknowledged the great presence of youth both through her acceptance speech and at a reception following the awards.

"The youth struggle is very important, especially in anti-pollution efforts. There needs to be solidarity among all youth here," she said.

Grueso's courage earned her the title of one of the most inspiring leaders of Latin America's environmental movement. She led a campaign that secured more than 5.9 million acres in territorial rights for Columbia's black rural communities, and is now focusing on protecting Colombia's Pacific rainforest.

Two women from India who received a Goldman Award also responded to the motivated youth when accepting their Prize.

"The youth are the only ones who can do this anymore. The youth are the only ones who can bring the companies to the law," said Champa Devi Shukla who, along with fellow activist Rashda Bee, is still pursuing their struggle to fight Union Carbide and Dow Chemical.

This is the year that marks the 20th anniversary of the toxic pesticide spill of Bhopal, India, one of the world's biggest industrial disasters, killing 8,000 people immediately, and 20,000 people since. Both women continue to spread enlightenment through environmental justice, using all of their prize money to start programs to help the health and well being of survivors and their families.

"All these youth of whom these companies are destroying their lives need to wake up and realize what these companies are doing to their lives and the environment," said Bee in her speech.

Anne Purdy, coordinator of the Goldman Award's Youth Program, said: " The youth program and presence of youth is one of the most important things. I want to share with them ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

The inspiring youth program followed the ceremony. Van Jones, Executive Director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, acknowledged the diverse array of youth groups in attendance through listing their names and location. Malaika Edwards, an 18-year-old activist from the People's Grocery in West Oakland, gave a personal account of her transformation to an environmentally savvy, healthy eater. Lastly, Patrick Reinsborough, former organizing director of the Rainforest Action Network, followed with a speech in which he reiterated a vital theme of the ceremony: Youth are not the leaders of the future, but rather the leaders of today.

## RESOURCES:

More information about the Goldman Environmental Prize can be found at [www.goldmanprize.org](http://www.goldmanprize.org)