

The environment – the world media’s greatest challenge

NOW, more than ever, there is a vital need for well-informed public debate in the world’s media about the globe’s growing environmental issues. The Greenaccord Association was recently born out of this necessity, and to highlight the priority, held its inaugural international media forum at its home in the Tuscan town of Rapalano Terme, Italy, on 16 October.

Seventy-five environmental journalists were invited from 35 countries, including Australia, with strong representation from South and North America, Africa, Asia and Europe. The idea for the forum was sparked by a call from Pope John Paul II, in the year of Jubilee 2000, for Christians to address ‘the great problem of environmental degradation’. Despite its Catholic origins, the organisation is secular in its approach and seeks to encourage deeper reflection upon the way environmental issues are portrayed in the media.

For Greenaccord the definition of ‘ecology’ embraces both nature in the environmental sense and the cognitive and behavioural processes of the individual – the ecology of the human mind.

Through the preamble, to a statement generated at the conference, the journalists project themselves 100 years into a future where temperatures have soared with potentially devastating consequences for planet life.

It suggests ‘If that catastrophe unfolds historians may look back and wonder what stories journalists were telling while the world was transformed around them.

‘Is this all scaremongering? We don’t know. But given the level of risk and uncertainty, we must ask if our people and leaders are served with the

depth of information and quality of debate to make the crucial decisions required.

‘Many of the issues are extremely complex and contentious. They cover almost all of the activities of people and the rest of the natural world, including economics ... energy, education, culture and agriculture. They don’t lend themselves to easy headlines or straightforward narratives and they are often subverted by cheap slogans and oversimplistic analysis,’ the preamble points out.

In the light of this, the association agreed to promote a forum for dialogue and professional support among environmental journalists and other relevant players, to strengthen their skills and capacity, and to monitor the trends and conditions that impact on their work and effectiveness.

For Greenaccord the definition of ‘ecology’ embraces both nature in the environmental sense and the cognitive and behavioural processes of the individual – the ecology of the human mind.

While it is hoped that funding will be available to support annual meetings of the Greenaccord network, the website will be the focus of ongoing communication.

The website should be of interest to a wider audience. Amongst other things it is expected to include an open forum for debate about environmental reportage in all corners of the globe, as well as an outlet for politically sensitive stories which can’t be published in their countries of origin.

Also at the meeting, keynote speaker Dr Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate



Alexandra de Blas

Paulo Bernardi, Vice President of the Greenaccord Association which called on international environmental journalists to take up the challenge of informed coverage of key issues.

Change, expressed doubt that the Kyoto Protocol would be ratified. He suggested that we should be looking to alternatives in this eventuality.

that it contributes up to 50% of its annual profit to works of public benefit. Initially many of the attending journalists were sceptical about the ‘real agenda’ of the conference as all expenses were paid, but the organisers appeared to be quite genuine in their aims. The hospitality expressed by the Tuscan hosts was extraordinary in its generosity and quality.

● Alexandra de Blas



Jiang Yan

Alexandra de Blas was invited to represent Australia at the Greenaccord Media Forum. She is the presenter of *Earthbeat* on ABC Radio National.

More information:
Earthbeat@your.abc.net.au;
www.greenaccord.org