

Friday, July 28, 2006

## EARTH DIALOGUES BRISBANE 2006 - A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

I am pleased to report that Brisbane Festival's Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006 exceeded all expectations. Accolades from participants, audience members and the media are pouring in every day and co-chair President Mikhail Gorbachev said he and Green Cross International were very impressed.

Many said it was a bold move to bring experts from across the globe to Queensland to develop solutions to some of the most critical issue of our time. But that move has paid off.

66 speakers from 11 countries, including four Nobel Peace Laureates, traveled to Brisbane for the world forum as part of Brisbane Festival 2006. They shared their ideas about how best to address major issues such as global warming, climate change and resource management before a packed City Hall.

I am particularly pleased that Brisbane Festival was able to make this a free public event.

An emotional highlight for many people was when Chair of Green Cross International and Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006 Co-Chair, Mikhail Gorbachev, addressed the enthusiastic crowd. More than 1000 people jumped to their feet giving the great man a standing ovation when he walked on stage to deliver his World Forum Address.

Mr Gorbachev wasted little time before issuing a blunt warning that we are "in a global time of trouble."

"The world is swept with a lot of concerns and alarm. Political leaders need to find a way to act or leave," Mr Gorbachev said.

Following his World Forum Address and another standing ovation, Mr Gorbachev delighted the audience by instigating an impromptu question and answer session with the capacity crowd.

Brisbane Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman responded to the discussion, proposing to sponsor two years secretarial support for the creation of a Green Cross International headquarters in Brisbane. Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie quickly followed by also committing his Government's support.

Day two of the World Forum saw another packed auditorium. In an emotional address Iranian Nobel Peace Laureate and human right's activist Shirin Ebadi asserted we must have peace before we can have environmental sustainability.

"In times of war and bloodshed, people are concerned about saving their lives, so preservation of the environment fails to mean anything," she said.

Ms Ebadi brought the hushed crowd to their feet as she finished her address with a simple request.

"Wish each other kindness, it's the only commodity that will not be depleted by its expenditure."

The focus of the World Forum turned to Queensland youth on the final day of Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006. More than 500 school students from across the state made their way to City Hall to share their ideas for the future with world leaders as part of Education Day.

Fifteen year old Youth Ambassador, Elena Ryan, told the audience social attitudes must change if a safe and sustainable future is to occur.

“When we have that social change the environment will follow,” she said.

Miss Ryan was later encouraged by Betty Williams, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976 for her work to bring peace to her native Ireland.

“Elena – you are a magnificent young woman. You touched my heart,” Ms Williams said.

To ensure the students’ ideas are remembered, Townsville student Dylan Furnell presented Premier Peter Beattie with the Queensland Student Blueprint for Environmental Sustainability.

More than 10,000 Queensland students contributed to the unique Blueprint by taking part in the Earth Dialogues Brisbane Challenge Program, a special education program developed by the Brisbane Festival and the Department of Education and the Arts.

The Blueprint outlined many environmental challenges, including a plea to every Queenslander to do at least one new thing to make an enduring difference.

To mark the official closing of Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006 delegates produced a Draft Plan of Action which called for everyone to be an activist.

“We, the participants of Earth Dialogues Brisbane, recognise that our environmental, security and development challenges are interdependent. There can be no sustainable peace while the majority of the world’s population lives in poverty. There can be no sustainable peace if we fail to rise to the global challenge presented by climate change. There can be no sustainable peace while military spending takes precedence over human development.”

A number of general recommendations were outlined, included recognising the Earth Charter as providing an ethical framework for sustainable development and calling on the Federal Government to actively support the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I am delighted with the enthusiasm people displayed during the three day World Forum, and I feel confident the ideas and solutions that were developed at Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006 will be taken into account by political leaders for many years to come. On a personal level I hope that those who attended the World Forum make small changes to their daily routines, to help create a big impact on the world and leave a safe environment for our children.