

Ugandan journo wins UNEP Young Environmental Journalist Award

NAIROBI: Ugandan radio journalist Patricia Okoed-Bukumunhe has won the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Young Environmental Journalist Award for her report, "Climate change and Uganda", broadcast on Radio France International. Jury members described the entry as "original, cutting edge environmental reporting".



Okoed-Bukumunhe was presented with her specially-commissioned trophy by UNEP executive director Achim Steiner, US Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa Jackson and members of the jury. The ceremony was held on the opening day of the UNEP Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environment Forum where environment ministers from across the world, senior government officials and civil society are meeting from 21 - 24 February 2011.

Effects of climate change in Uganda

Okoed-Bukumunhe's winning radio entry described the far-reaching effects of climate change on Uganda's environment and economy. Her piece covered the impact of increasingly erratic weather patterns on the coffee industry - Uganda's largest export - and how the melting of snow on the peaks of the Rwenzori Mountains could damage the country's tourism industry. The report also showed how climate change is putting increasing pressure on water supplies to Uganda's homes and agriculture and even leading to a potential border dispute.

"As a journalist, I feel it is essential that issues to do with climate change and our changing environment continue to be communicated to readers, listeners and viewers in Africa," said Okoed-Bukumunhe.

"It is important to show that climate change and its effects are not just a Western phenomenon but are a reality in Africa, with increasingly severe consequences for us all. I'm honoured to win the first UNEP Young Environmental Journalist Award and to be recognised not only for my job, which is my passion, but for something I hope can contribute to the movement to protect our planet," she added.

About Okoed-Bukumunhe

A broadcast journalist with 13 years experience in local and international media, Okoed-Bukumunhe works as a news editor and anchor at Capital Radio - a private FM radio station in Uganda. She is also a freelance journalist with Paris-based Radio France International and has worked with ORF radio in Austria as a freelance producer handling features and magazine shows. She lists her main fields of interest as the environment, health and women's issues.

As part of her prize, Okoed-Bukumunhe will take part in a professional exchange visit to the US, following a specially-designed "green itinerary". She will travel across the country, interacting with environmental experts, leading environmental journalists, scientists and public figures.

UN under-secretary-general and UNEP executive director Achim Steiner congratulated the winner on her success.

"Crisp, clear, coherent..."

"Crisp, clear, coherent, factual and authoritative journalism, delivered in an engaging and lively style, is needed as never before in a world of rapidly growing environmental challenges and multiple media vying for the public's attention - from newspapers, radio and TV to increasingly the internet and information on mobile phones. This is why UNEP, with support from the government of the United States, decided to establish this new award," said Steiner.

"The high quality of submissions to this first UNEP Young Environmental Journalist Award underlines how reporters in Africa are rising to the challenge of dealing with the complexities of the world in which we live and informing the public of the opportunities for a different development path as we travel along the Road to Rio for the crucial sustainable development conference next year. Congratulations to Patricia Okoed-Bukumunhe for her excellent reports on climate change and its importance to Africa and Uganda - one of the overarching issues facing this continent and facing the world as we look towards a transition to a low carbon, resource-efficient Green Economy," he added.

Showcasing excellence

Launched in November 2010, the UNEP Young Environmental Journalist Award aims to showcase excellence in the field of environmental reporting and to nurture new talent that will help to shape opinion on the environment in Africa, and beyond, years to come. The award is made possible through funding from the US Department of State.

A total of 110 entries were received from television, radio, online and print journalists in 24 countries. African journalists from 25 to 35 years were eligible to enter, with each candidate submitting one article or report on an environmental theme. Entries covered themes as diverse as role of traditional 'medicine men' in protecting biodiversity in Kenya, the environmental impact of charcoal use in Malawi to the public health risk posed by vegetables contaminated with polluted water in Tanzania.

The jury for the award brought together four high-profile journalists, activists and media experts. They included Amie Joof, executive director of the Senegal-based Inter-African Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development (FAMEDEV), Diran Onifade, journalist and manager with the Nigerian Television Authority and president of the African Federation of Science Journalists, Madeleine Mukamabano, media consultant and former presenter of 'Le Débat Africain' on Radio France International and Somali-born Omar Faruk, president of the Federation of African Journalists.

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