

## YOUTH ACTIVISTS TO CHALLENGE WORLD LEADERS AT WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

**London, 22 January 2008** Six young activists will represent the voice of a generation when they send a powerful message to world leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week.

The *Davos Six* will take part in a major session - *Future Shifts: The Voice of the Next Generation* – at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in the Congress Centre (Senada 1&2) on Thursday 24 January, 2008. The *Davos Six* will share the platform with the acclaimed British Actress Emma Thompson and the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata. The session is chaired by Becky Anderson of CNN International.

The youth activists were selected by more than fifty of their peers aged between 16 to 19 years-old from over 40 countries worldwide during a week of workshops in Guildford, UK, to represent their views at the World Economic Forum as part of the pioneering British Council initiative *The Road to Davos*.

The young delegates will take their recommendations to Davos, Switzerland, to make a challenge to world leaders on global issues such as climate change, education, intercultural conflict and the devastating impact of poverty. The initiative is devised by the UK's international body for cultural relations, the British Council, in partnership with the World Economic Forum aimed at giving a voice to the views of the younger generation for solutions to global issues and their vision for the future. The *Davos Six* will be the youngest ever delegates at the high profile event.

The news comes in the light of a recent global survey conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the British Council to research the international outlook of young people aged between 11-16 years of age. When asked what are the biggest issues facing the world today are, the respondents' overall said terrorism was their biggest concern with 44 per cent of votes followed by national/international conflict (39%), climate change (33%), poverty (33%), drug

abuse (24%), famine (23%), AIDS/HIV (22%), crime (22%), health (12%), population growth (8%) and religious fundamentalism polling 8 per cent.

Significantly, 85 per cent of respondents' felt that it was important for leaders of countries to do more to build friendly relations with other countries whilst more than half went out of their way to understand current events in the world.

Chief Executive of the British Council, Martin Davidson, said: 'Young people around the world are making amazing personal contributions in politics, in climate change, in social activities. We, and the World Economic Forum, want to give them an opportunity to challenge the worlds' leaders on a range of issues. The youth of the world are not only passive recipients of education or passive consumers; they want to take responsibility into their own hands. The issues discussed at Davos are global issues that concern them as much as the world leaders'.

The *Davos Six* will also share their experiences with their peers and the wider public on a website created specially for the programme – [www.roadtodavos.net](http://www.roadtodavos.net) – which will feature regular updates from the World Economic Forum. The *Davos Six* are, in their own words:

#### **Gillion Bosman from South Africa**

'I am 19 years old. I work with young people aged 13-19 in poor communities in and around Cape Town. We focus on issues of identity and human rights, using the arts as an educational and relevant yet fun methodology. I focus specifically on South Africa's history and the struggle for identity.'

#### **Rhadeena De Alwis from SriLanka**

'I am 18 years of age and I work with street and slum children on the outskirts of Colombo. These children are marginalised by society and have low self confidence. This is why I choose to spend my time with them, giving them the confidence they need to branch out into society and carry on with their education. I believe that young people have to put themselves out in the rain and face the thunder if they intend to make a difference and that is why I do what I do.'

#### **Nick Henderson from Scotland**

'I am 19 years old and grew up in Glasgow. The group I work for, Youth End Poverty (YEP) Dundee, seeks out the most marginalised young people in society, those that cannot access services because of the barriers of poverty. We feel strongly about ensuring that those who face multiple barriers, young poor people who may be lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender,

HIV+ or sexually exploited, have the same opportunity to hope that other young people have.'

### **Juan Nascimbene from Argentina**

'I am 16 years old. My activism is found both inside and outside school. We go twice or three times a year to different and humble schools and communities and our main focus is that of raising awareness of the value of education. At the same time I have an independent group which involves the setting up of a library and community forum in a shelter home to provide a space for young people to interact and share ideas. I believe that the voice of youth should be heard, not only because we represent the future but because we can produce a transformation in our present society.'

### **Whitney Burton from the USA**

'I'm an 18 year old university student at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia and I'm from Houston, Texas. I started an initiative at my high school called 'Building Futures' to raise money to build a school in Sierra Leone. We also worked to empower youth to understand their power to make a positive difference in the world. I now work for a charity called 'Free the Children', the largest network of children helping children through education, helping young people get involved in global issues.'

### **Yunan Jin from China**

'I am 17 years old and come from Beijing. I focus my activism on environmental issues, especially on climate change. I started out 4 years ago when I initiated a program called 'A Tree a Day' in which volunteers head to Inner Mongolia for 2 weeks every year and every person plants 365 trees during that period. 20,000 trees have already been planted, covering approx 1 square kilometre. I've focused on promoting climate awareness in my school and community through lectures and documentary showings. I founded [www.sco2.cn](http://www.sco2.cn), a website that aims to help people develop eco friendly lifestyles. I also hold 3 patents in the field of biomass briquettes and IC enzymes.'

The British Council is happy to welcome the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown back as patron of the *Road to Davos* project. In a message to the participants, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of giving young people a voice on the global stage in Davos. He said: 'It's a journey they've undertaken to stand up for what they believe in and to ensure that the world they will live in will become a better place. The participants have already shown courage, commitment, conviction; young people are more than our future, they are our here

and now, and however young, whatever their background, wherever they're from, they can make a real difference'.

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For information concerning press accreditation at WEF, please see

<http://www.weforum.org/en/media/index.htm>

Watch the 'Future Shifts' Session live via Webstream:

<http://gaia.world->

[television.com/wef/worldeconomicforum%5Fannualmeeting2008/default.aspx?sn=23283](http://television.com/wef/worldeconomicforum%5Fannualmeeting2008/default.aspx?sn=23283)

**Notes to Editors:**

- The British Council is the UK's international body for cultural relations. We work in 110 countries worldwide to build trust and understanding between the UK and other countries through the arts, education and training, science and technology, sport, good governance and human rights. Our income in 2006/07 was £551 million, of which our grant-in-aid from the British government was £189 million. For more information, please visit: [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)
- Ipsos MORI is now the second largest and one of the best known research companies in Britain with global reach as a key part of Ipsos, the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest survey research group, operating in 45 countries. For more information, please visit: [www.ipsos-mori.com](http://www.ipsos-mori.com)