

Plant-for-the-Planet - a million trees to be planted in every country on earth

Image via Wikipedia

I met Felix today. Felix Finkbeiner, Climate Justice Ambassador, to give him his full title. He is 13 years old. When he was 9, he started **Plant-for-the-Planet**. Inspired by his teacher, he gave a presentation at school in Germany in which he explained to his classmates how the greenhouse gas effect works and the horrific consequences in terms of global warming. He had also read that trees can capture these dangerous greenhouse gases, which lead him to end his presentation with these words:

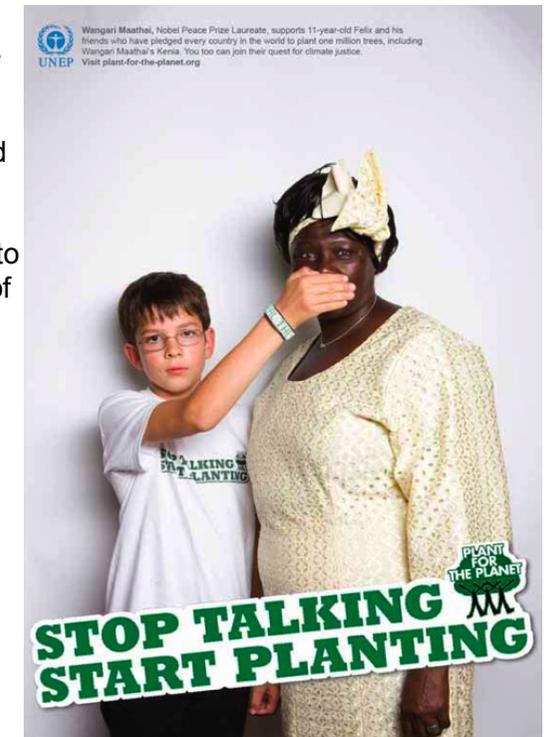
“Let us plant a million trees in each country on Earth!”

And so began Plant-for-the-Planet, a global movement that has got children all over the world both planting trees and fighting for climate justice.

Felix’s biggest tree-planting influence was Wangari Maathai from my birthplace, Kenya. Also known as Mama Miti – The Mother of Trees, Wangari Maathai still remembers when she was young and her mother would send her out to gather wood.

“Do not take dry wood out from under a fig tree,” Her mother would say. “It is a tree god! We do not use him and we do not cut him down.”

Something else Wangari’s mother used to say was, “Do not just sit around idly, go plant something!” Wangari would become famous around the world for doing just that. In the 1970s, she founded the Green Belt Movement, an environmental non-government organization focused on the planting of trees, environmental conservation and women’s rights. In 2004, she became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for “her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.” She nearly 30 years, she mobilized poor women to plant a total of 30 million trees!



“It’s the little things citizens do.

That’s what will make the difference.

My little thing is planting trees.”

- Wangari Maathai

Nobel Peace Prize recipient and environment activist

I met Felix at the Natural Science Museum in Durban earlier today. Several groups of schoolchildren were huddled together, coming up with plans of how to start **Plant-for-the-Planet** in their community. The excitement was almost tangible. Felix had given a talk and presentation earlier. All around the hall were posters of the Plant-for-the-Planet **Stop Talking, Start Planting** campaign. They featured princes, dignatories, sportsmen, music stars, models and, yes, Nobel Peace Prize winners. All of them with Felix, who stands next to each famous individual with his hand over that individual's mouth. There is a poster of Felix with his mentor, Wangari Maathai. And a poster of one of Felix's protégés with her hand over the mouth of Prince Albert of Monaco who was recently in Durban with his South African wife, Princess Charlene.

I am in awe of this child. He has achieved more in his very young years than I have in ... well, I'm not going to say how long.

Felix is out here in Durban to motivate the children of South Africa to organize their own a Plant-for-the-Planet Academy. In these academies, children inform other children about the climate crisis, equity and global citizenship. They empower fellow kids to also become Ambassadors for Climate Justice. The message is that everyone can assume responsibility and an actively shape the future by organizing planting parties, giving speeches, and encouraging others to participate.

I meet Felix's family and get roped into a committee meeting, sitting on white plastic chairs out in the courtyard of the museum, the spring sun gently beating down on us. The discussion is around how to promote the South African Plant-for-the-Planet Academy during **COP17/CMP7**. Could there be some kind of tree-planting activity around or near the ICC venue that will be attracting 30 000+ delegates towards the end of November and into early December? I suggest something at the Green Hub, near the mouth of the Umgeni River and, co-incidentally, close to where I live. I know they are planning a Green Market at that time that will feature a mini-sustainable home expo, storytellers, bike rides, walks to the Mangrove Swamps, and a whole lot more. Everyone responds enthusiastically. Various other events leading up to COP17/CMP7 are mentioned that seem to have great synergy with **Plant-for-the-Planet**. Felix's father is getting more and more excited as his wife busily types all the information into her laptop.

Felix and his family know all about COP. They were at COP16/CMP6 in Cancun, Mexico last year. Will they be attending this year? No, because Felix needs to get back to school. But that doesn't seem to be an issue for him for, by the time the latest COP conference begins, there will be many more Ambassadors for Climate Change, this time from South Africa.

So, what's next for Felix? A trip to the Indigo Skate Camp near the Isithumba Village in the Valley of a Thousand Hills on Sunday. Then off to Lesotho as a guest of the King.

Well, well.

I'm counting on Felix to be President of something, or Chancellor of Germany or Head of the United Nations. At least before he's 15!

See Felix by Liking this page!