

## Conference kickoff: balloons sail over Bonn after tree planting with 13-year-old Felix Finkbeiner

By Hannah Rückel and Litha Mpondwana

Felix Finkbeiner wasn't shy this morning about spreading his message of "stop talking, start planting" during a tree planting ceremony to kick off the 64th United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) NGO Conference in Bonn, Germany.

The bespectacled 13-year-old, who started 'Plant for the Planet' four years ago as a school project, covered the mayor of Bonn's mouth with his hand to symbolize the need for action not rhetoric in reducing carbon emissions.

"We know the problems that we have on this planet. We also know the solutions to these problems, so now is really time to start acting," said Felix, whose organization has planted more than 1 million trees in Germany.



Jürgen Nimptsch, Mayor of Bonn (left) with Felix Finkbeiner (right) about to release 64 balloons as part of the tree planting ceremony. Photo by Ngalula Kabutakapua.

His goal is to plant one trillion trees around the world by 2050; and he's one step closer to reaching that milestone after Felix and a group of officials, including UN Under-Secretary General Kiyo Akasaka, NGO Chair of the conference Felix Dodds, and Mayor of Bonn Jürgen Nimptsch baptized a newly planted red thorn on a grassy plot near the conference grounds.

"We will come and go but this tree we will remember," said Akasaka. Mayor Nimptsch said the tree is a symbol of ongoing commitment to the environment and a visible encouragement for people to volunteer.

Jian Lee and his green thumbs from 10000Stories on Vimeo.

Bernward Geier, coordinator of the German NGO Focal Group, said the tree will stay even though the conference attendees will leave Bonn. He is hopeful that it will "leave a mark" and be remembered at next year's UN's conference on sustainability in Rio De Janeiro.

Dodds emphasized the role of volunteers, saying that everyone needs to take responsibility for protecting the world's resources. 2011 marks the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and is also the International Year of the Forest.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, 64 balloons – stamped with an image of the globe –

were released and sailed above Bonn; a reminder that the entire world has a role to play in order to create a sustainable society.