

## Dr. Mohammad Yunus



Born in Bangladesh in 1940, **Mohammad Yunus** won a Fullbright scholarship to Harvard University before obtaining a doctorate in economics from Vanderbilt University in the United States. Returning to his

homeland to teach economics, Yunus began a radical experiment aimed at alleviating hunger and poverty. Working on the assumption that "the able bodied poor don't want or need charity...all they need is financial capital," he set up the Grameen ("village") Bank in 1983. By offering loans of less than €100, the bank allows poor villagers to buy livestock, tools or machines at low interest rates, allowing small businesses to often double or triple the income of their owners. Over the past 20 years, Grameen has helped over two million Bangladeshis and the 'micro-credit-concept' has now extended to over 60 countries worldwide. Yunus, author of 'The Poor People's Banker,' has won numerous awards for his work including The World Food Prize Award, the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace and Disarmament and the Care Humanitarian Award. Hailed as one of the 25 most influential Asians by Asia Week magazine, Yunus has also served on numerous United Nations committees and received honorary doctorates from universities in Britain, Canada and the United States. The prize-winning economist and managing director of the Grameen bank currently lives in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka with his physicist wife Afroz and their daughter Deena.

## Dr. Madhav Gadgil



Born in 1942, **Madhav Gadgil** studied biology at the universities of Poona and Bombay (Mumbai) before doing a Ph.D. thesis in mathematical ecology at Harvard University. After a brief spell teaching biology at Harvard, Gadgil returned to work at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore in 1973, where he is currently a Professor of Ecological Sciences. His pioneering research on the impact of humans on the environment in the hill chain of the Western Ghats won him many awards and also led to the establishment of India's first biosphere reserve. The author of two books and over 150 research papers – two of which are recognized as citation classics - Gadgil is a regular commentator on ecological issues for English and Indian language media. He has also been a scientific advisor to the Indian prime minister and the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity. He currently chairs the scientific and technical advisory panel of the Global Environment Facility. As well as sitting on the boards of numerous Indian research establishments, Gadgil is a fellow of the Third World Academy of Sciences, a foreign associate of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and an honorary member of the British Ecological Society.

# THE VOLVO ENVIRONMENT PRIZE

## Two champions of the poor from the Indian sub-continent have won this year's Volvo Environment Prize



Indian scientist **Madhav Gadgil** and Bangladeshi economist **Muhammad Yunus** shared the prestigious award for coming up with 21st century answers to the age-old question of how to tackle poverty without destroying the environment.

"The environmental problems of our times are often so complex and multifaceted that they call for Renaissance thinking, challenging scientists and activists alike to go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries," the prize committee said in its citation. "Madhav Gadgil and Muhammad Yunus, each in his own way, is a sterling example of thinking outside the disciplinary box."

Presenting the €167,000 award at a ceremony in Brussels yesterday (29 October), EU Environment Commissioner **Margot Wallström** also paid homage to the two laureates for "using their expertise, scientific research and human understanding to solve burning environmental and social problems in the developing world - and I hope in the developed world."

In a speech highlighting the vital role of science in delivering sustainable development, Wallström quoted Francis Bacon's dictum: "Knowledge is power."

"Nowadays we are faced with environmental challenges that were unknown during his time," said the Swedish Commissioner. "But more than ever we need knowledge to give us the power to solve the problems we face."

In many ways, Madhav Gadgil is the living embodiment of Bacon's belief. One of the world's leading ecologists and conservationists, the Indian scientist has worked tirelessly to mitigate the conflict of interest between man's needs and those of nature.

"His work is a model for how science can help bring people and nature together for win-win solutions," said the Volvo



Environment Prize Committee, an independent body served by many of the finest minds in the scientific field.

Gadgil, who has been a professor at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore for 30 years, is no ordinary academic. Despite degrees from the universities of Poona and Bombay (Mumbai) in India and a doctorate from Harvard University in the United States, he draws his inspiration from local people and local traditions.

"If people have control over their local natural resources and there is a genuine commitment to democratic processes, we will see tremendous progress in poverty alleviation," said Gadgil before receiving his award.

Widely credited as the inspiration behind India's first biosphere reserve in the Western Ghats hill chain, the 61-year old professor is also considered to be the father of India's Biological Diversity Act.

Paying tribute to her compatriot, former prizewinner **Dr. Gita Sen** said: "Madhav Gadgil represents science at its best – precisely because he doesn't take the givens of science as given."

Muhammad Yunus is also something of a revolutionary – refusing to accept traditional banking principles or indeed standard prescriptions for lifting people out of the misery of poverty.

Like Gadgil, Dr. Yunus also left a glittering academic career behind him to help poor people in his native Bangladesh. At a seminar prior to the prize-giving ceremony, the 63-year economist explained why he took the decision.

"In the 1970s I was teaching elegant theories of economics in the classroom while outside the classroom people were dying of hunger," he told an audience of scientists, business people and policy makers in the Belgian capital.

Yunus refuses to accept poverty as a natural human condition that cannot be alleviated. "Poverty is not created by poor people," he says. "It is created by institutions and policies and if we start changing those institutions and policies, no person in the world would be poor."

In 1983, the Harvard graduate decided to put his money where his mouth was by setting up the Grameen Bank. This ground-breaking lending facility, which now has 13,000 employees, makes small loans available to poor villagers who would not normally qualify for commercial credit.

Women have been the major beneficiaries, accounting for more than 90% of all Grameen loans. As **Tor Kihlmen** head of the prize's scientific committee, said: "Yunus has played a major role in the emancipation of women in Bangladesh and elsewhere."

It is no coincidence that the title of Yunus' book about the Grameen experience is called "The Poor People's Banker", because the World Food Prize Laureate has lent to over three million borrowers in over 30,000 villages in Bangladesh. Indeed, the micro-credit concept has been so successful that it has been imitated in 60 countries worldwide.

Fresh from steering a landmark chemicals proposal through the Commission, Wallström told guests at the prize-giving ceremony that there was "still a gap between research and policy. Too many research reports are gathering dust instead of guiding policy. And too many policies still lack scientific backing."

Wallström said the Volvo Environment Prize was "trying to bridge this gap" by demonstrating that "progress on the road to sustainable development requires the involvement of all: industry, the scientific community, civil society and government – 'a coalition of good will'."

Challenged by seminar moderator **Anders Wijkman** MEP as to how Volvo intended to contribute to this goal, the President and CEO of the car company, **Hans Olov Olsson**, said: "I am convinced industry has an important role to play in global sustainable development."

## Nominate candidates for the Volvo Environment Prize 2004

The Volvo Environment Prize Foundation invites universities, research institutes, scientists and engineers in the field of environmental protection, life sciences, earth sciences and social sciences, by national academies of science and their staff as well as other persons and organisations to submit nominations for the 2003 Volvo Environment Prize. The Volvo Environment Prize is awarded for "Outstanding innovations or discoveries scientific, socio-economic, or technological which have direct or indirect significance in the environmental field and are of global or regional importance".

Forms for nominations can be found at [www.environment-prize.com](http://www.environment-prize.com)

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### ABOUT VOLVO CARS

Volvo was founded in Gothenburg, Sweden, by Gustaf Larson and Assar Gabrielsson. The first car left the factory in 1927. Since 1999 VCC has been wholly owned by Ford Motor Company. Along with Aston Martin, Jaguar and Land Rover, VCC is part of Ford's Premier Automotive Group (PAG). VCC functions as a "Center of Excellence for Safety" within the Ford Motor Company and as a "Center of Excellence for Telematics" within PAG. This means that safety research carried out by VCC has a strong influence on all car brands within the Ford Group.

Volvo Car Corporation and Volvo Group own the Volvo brand in a joint trademark company.

### ABOUT VOLVO GROUP REPRESENTATION, EU

Formed in 1996 and based at the heart of the EU in Brussels, the capital of Belgium, Volvo Group Representation EU has recently strengthened its resources to meet the growing call on its services and an expanding EU and has been enhanced to ensure a more comprehensive Volvo Group Representation EU Office service.

The office focuses on lobbying, opinion building, corporate spokesmen support and Group representation.

Head of the office is Stefan Lorentzson

## The Volvo Environment Prize

Volvo has always been about more than manufacturing cars, buses, trucks and aerospace equipment – although with annual sales amounting to 19.3 billion euro, the Swedish company is one of Europe's biggest firms. For decades, the Gothenburg-based group has pioneered safer, cleaner, more user friendly vehicles. So it was only natural that in 1988 Volvo shareholders decided to set aside €2.23 million to create an annual environment prize worth €167,500.

Determined to ensure the independence of the award, two committees were formed to screen and select the laureates. The Royal Society for Arts and Sciences initially screens the nominations and presents its recommendations to a Prize Committee, which selects the laureates. Both bodies are completely independent of Volvo and are served by some of the finest minds in the environmental, technological and scientific fields both in Sweden and around the world.

Nominations for the prestigious prize are invited from scientists, engineers and academics working in the areas of environmental protection, life sciences and social sciences. Through the years the prize has been awarded to pioneers, innovators and groundbreakers whose work shows a clear understanding of the social, economic and environmental links involved in sustainable development.

In the 13 years since the first Volvo Environment Prize was awarded, there have been six solo laureates and seven joint winners. Demonstrating the diversity of the winners between rich and poor countries, the United States and India have provided no fewer than six laureates apiece, with Britain supplying three.

Past winners of the prize include: **Dr. Gita Sen** of the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore for creating a deeper understanding of how development and the environment are conditioned by the changing role of women in society; **Dr. James Lovelock**, a British scientist whose discoveries helped pave the way for international action to tackle ozone depletion; and Swedish professor **Malin Falkenmark** and American academic **David Schindler** for pioneering work on water management.

Last year, the award went to two economists of international distinction – Professors **Sir Partha Dasgupta** and **Karl-Göran Mäler** – for their contributions to environmental and resource economics.

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