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United Nations Environment Programme



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## Children speak out about the climate crisis

*Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet*

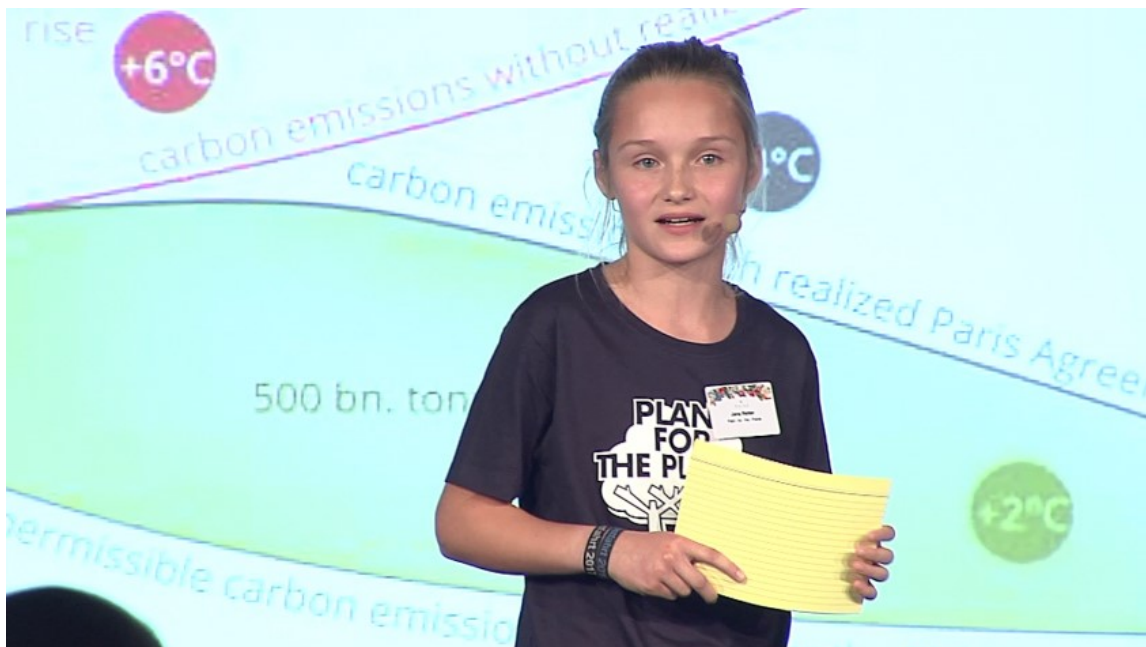
Germany-based international campaign group Plant-for-the-Planet aims to plant a trillion trees by 2030.

Jana steps onto the stage. She's a bit nervous, as she scans her audience of about 100 chief executive officers and high-level company executives to which she is expected to give her speech. And she is only 12.

*Although only 12, Jana gives speeches to chief executive officers. Her topic: how to slow down the climate crisis and save her generation's future. Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet.*

Jana tells the story of a young boy who had an idea that sounded both unrealistic and childish—to plant one trillion trees all around the world.

In 2007, nine-year-old Felix gave a presentation in his class about the climate crisis. While preparing this presentation, he read about Wangari Maathai, also called the “mother of trees”. The first female professor in Africa and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Wangari Maathai empowered women in Africa by planting trees with them. Together, they planted 30 million trees.



At that time, Felix's goal was to save the polar bear, his favourite animal. But soon, Felix understood that the climate crisis not only threatens polar bears, but all children around the globe. Reading Wangari Maathai's story, Felix learned that trees help reduce climate change by capturing carbon.



*At the age of nine, Felix started the children's initiative Plant-for-the-Planet. Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet.*

At the end of his presentation, Felix said: "Let's plant one million trees in every country of the world." He really had no idea how many one million trees were. It was the largest number he could imagine, and he knew that his generation needed as many trees as possible.

His idea fascinated his classmates, other students, teachers and journalists. The children started a competition among German schools, and soon planted their millionth tree. But when the children were invited to speak at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Felix was really excited. The children were going to be heard by the grown-ups and even Wangari Maathai would listen to his speech.



*"Old and young, rich and poor" – Felix called on the world to plant a trillion trees. Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet*

Children call at the UN for a common fight for their future - Felix Finkbeiner is s



At the United Nations, Felix called on the world to plant a trillion trees: “It is now time that we work together. We combine our forces. Old and young, rich and poor. And together, we can plant a trillion trees.”

Things then started to slowly fall into place. In 2011, UN Environment handed over its Billion Tree Campaign ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billion\\_Tree\\_Campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billion_Tree_Campaign)) to the children and youth, and promoted the children’s campaign Stop talking. Start planting, opening doors to reach influential people. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, UN Environment and the Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation continue to collaborate.

“Awareness of the need for forest action has never been greater,” says UN Environment ecosystems expert Tim Christophersen. “We are seeing positive momentum and opportunity to take action on forests worldwide—driven by governments, civil-society organizations and businesses. We now need to systematically scale up and replicate solutions and empower all actors to restore degraded forests and landscapes. We can bring at least 350 million hectares under active restoration in the coming decade.”

At UN Environment, forests are a major front of action in the global fight against catastrophic climate change—thanks to their unparalleled capacity to absorb and store carbon. The UN-REDD Programme (<http://www.un-redd.org/>), a joint undertaking of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and UN Environment to fight deforestation and forest degradation, was developed to advance the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to foster innovative and collaborative approaches to address the existential challenge of climate change.



S.D. Fürst Albert II von Monaco unterstützt die 12-jährige Malien. Sie und ihre Freunde werden in jedem Land der Erde 1 Millionen Bäume pflanzen. Helfen auch Sie mit im Kampf für Klimagerechtigkeit auf:  
[www.plant-for-the-planet.org](http://www.plant-for-the-planet.org)



*Prince Albert of Monaco supports the children. Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet.*

Every month, some of the 70,000 children and youths who have joined Plant-for-The-Planet (<https://www.plant-for-the-planet.org/en/home>) as climate justice ambassadors take photos with important persons, covering the adult's mouths with their hands. Others, like Jana, give speeches. To help governments around the world limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-

industrial era levels, Jana set out to convince business leaders to do their share. “Climate politics needs new supporters: you, the companies,” she argues.

She also tells them how children like herself plant trees at Plant-for-the-Planet Academies and collect money to plant trees at a larger scale. On the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico, more than a hundred workers plant more than 5,000 trees per day. They plant native species, take care of every single seedling and reach survival rates of 94 per cent.



*Paulina and her team on the Yucatán Peninsula plant a tree every 15 seconds. Photo by Plant-for-the-Planet.*

But it's obvious that this can only be one reforestation project. Many more are needed globally. Twenty-seven African nations have promised, through AFR100 (<http://afr100.org/>), to plant 111 million hectares with trees, which equates to around 55 billion trees, and more nations have promised to plant 188 million hectares of forests through the Bonn Challenge (<http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge>). The shared goal: to plant 350 million hectares with new trees by 2030, an area bigger than India.

Meanwhile, children like Jana will continue to promote tree planting. After her speech, a newspaper published the headline: “12-Year-Old Steals the Show from Politics & Business Elites”. Jana needs the attention. It's about her future.

For further information, please contact Tim Christophersen  
(<mailto:tim.christophersen@un.org>)

*On 1 and 2 December 2018, UN Environment and partners are organizing the Global Landscapes Forum in Bonn, Germany (<https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/>) to exchange solutions for restoration, forestry and sustainable landscapes management.*

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#### TOPICS

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## Further Resources

Plant-for-The-Planet (<https://www.plant-for-the-planet.org/en/home>)

UN Environment's 2008 Plant a Billion campaign (<https://bit.ly/2KqLo9V>)

Forests provide a critical short-term solution to climate change (<https://bit.ly/2liuZkX>)

Forests: A natural solution to climate change, crucial for a sustainable future (<https://bit.ly/2QstLYR>)

The United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (<https://bit.ly/SDTIGp>)

Learn more about forests (<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/forests>)

Global Landscapes Forum (<https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/>)

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## Did you know?

Every dollar spent restoring degraded forests can result in \$30 in economic benefits.

