

VOA Special English Environment Report

JAILED MEXICAN WINS GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Environment Report.

The leader of a Mexican environmental movement is one of the winners of this year's Goldman Environmental Prize. Rodolfo Montiel Flores was awarded the prize last week. Representatives from the Goldman Foundation announced the award at a press conference in Mexico City.

The Goldman Environmental Prize is the world's largest program that honors local environmental activists. It was started ten years ago by Richard and Rhoda Goldman. The prize awards 125,000 dollars every year to environmental heroes from every continent in the world. The winners are chosen for their efforts to protect the environment.

The prize is one of seven to be awarded this year. The other six will be announced on April 17th, at the yearly ceremony in San Francisco, California.

The Goldman Foundation presented the award early to Mr. Montiel because of his unusual case. He has been in a Mexican prison for almost a year. The group had hoped that giving him the award early would have a positive effect on his trial.

Mr. Montiel led a movement to stop forest destruction near his village in the Mexican state of Guerrero. In 1995, state officials signed an agreement with an American company, Boise Cascade. The agreement permitted the company to cut trees and burn land in Guerrero.

Mr. Montiel said laws were violated, rivers were polluted and thousands of fish were killed. He sent protest letters to Mexican government officials. And he organized local farmers and environmentalists to block roads in the forests. The Mexican army violently suppressed the protests. Many protesters were arrested. Some were shot and killed.

Shortly after the protests, Boise Cascade suspended its operations in Guerrero. But tree-cutting in the area and the protests have continued.

Last May, Mr. Montiel and another farmer were arrested and beaten. They were accused of possessing illegal weapons and dealing in illegal drugs. But Mr. Montiel says they were forced to admit to the charges as a result of beatings and torture.

Mr. Montiel said he will use the prize money to purchase equipment to supply water to farmland. And he says he will continue to work to protect his homeland.

This VOA Special English Environment Report was written by Cynthia Kirk. This is Bill White.

Source: Voice of America, 4/14/2000

Re-posted by eigozai
No. 0123pdf (380 words)