

## Jane Goodall: Ambassador of Hope

Stuart Hamby, Special to The China Post

"The elite have to lead the way" in making environmental and humanitarian choices.

That was the message of eminent naturalist Jane Goodall when she spoke at a special event organized by the European Chamber of Commerce Taipei (ECCT) and the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei (AmCham) on Friday.

"The affluent among us...have this tremendous opportunity for changing the world, because we can afford to make ethical choices in what we buy and what we don't buy. And as you all know well enough, in this consumer-driven society, what you don't buy won't get made."

Goodall's message is one of hope and peace through personal responsibility. "Every day we get choices: what we eat, what we wear, where we go, who we speak to, how we react to problems that we meet. We make these choices all the time, and the cumulative effect of people making the right environmental and humanitarian choices in their daily life is going to be huge."

Goodall spoke in light of what she called "the worst conservation disaster to hit Africa since I began in 1960." She was referring to the destruction of the African forest, the cause of which she said was "people in the developed world taking and taking and taking the resources of the developing world."

She illustrated this disaster with an example of European and Asian logging companies that clear-cut forests and built roads to gain access to lumber. Adding to this damage, and to the damage caused by the influx of thousands of people who have never traditionally lived in the region, hunters now ride the logging trucks into the forest and, Goodall stated, "(stop) at the end of the road (and shoot) everything: elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, monkeys, antelope...and (then take) the meat into town—not to feed starving people, not to feed the local people, but to feed the elite: the growing middle class who will pay more for a piece of smoked bushmeat. This is absolutely not sustainable." She called the state of the African environment "a grim situation."

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But Africa, of course, is not the only area on the planet facing an environmental crisis. "If we look at the developed world, how are we doing, as far as the environment is concerned?" she asked, giving the issue immediacy. "Not very well: we are poisoning the air, the water, and the land. You know all about that in Taiwan. I don't have to tell you about the quality of the air that sometimes gets so bad in Taipei, as it does in other places around the world."

As overwhelming as such environmental disasters may seem, however, she states that "The worst problem is apathy."

In fact, her message is not one of condemnation: "Is there hope for the future?" she asks rhetorically, before replying with an energized "Yes!" She then continues: "Once we realize around the world that environmental protection is our responsibility. Don't leave it to all the politicians and the top guys—the decision-makers. It depends on each one of us."

Her reasons for hope are "the amazing human brain...that can tackle problems and find solutions," "the resilience of Nature," what she calls "the indomitable human spirit," and "the energy and the commitment of youth."

Add to this list the Jane Goodall Institute's program for youth action: Roots and Shoots. Of the program, Goodall says, "Roots and Shoots, I think, is what gives me the hope and the optimism to continue."

Concerning the meaning of the name, Goodall explains "Roots make a firm foundation; shoots seem tiny, but to reach the light, they can break through brick walls. And if we see the brick walls as all the problems that we have inflicted on the planet, including human greed and cruelty and war and the threat of nuclear weapons, the roots and shoots have a message of hope."

The program encourages young people to confront the problems in their own communities, to treat animals ethically ("including domestic animals," she adds), and to clean up the environment. "The very heart of the Roots and Shoots philosophy is that every individual, every one of us, makes a difference every day."

With 329 branches, Taiwan represents nearly 10 percent of the global Roots and Shoots program. Of its members, she says, "We believe the tools of change are knowledge and understanding, hard work and persistence, love and compassion that lead to respect for all life."

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Reflecting on her years in the forest with the chimpanzees, she says, "I keep the peace in my heart." Despite rare attacks of pessimism, Goodall continues planting seeds for peace. In fact, her peaceful message has made her one of only nine recipients of the U.N. Messenger of Peace award.

What is the message Goodall brings to the world—that she exhorts the media to deliver?

"Tell people that what they do makes a difference."