

Speech by Principal Prince Claus Laureate Ma Jun on the occasion of the 2017 Prince Claus Awards at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam on 6 December 2017

Prince Claus Awards Ceremony, Royal Palace Amsterdam, 6 December 2017

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

I'm honored and truly humbled to share the Prince Claus Principal Award.

During the 20 years of my environmental journey, over and over again I have been struck by the damage to nature and by the stories of those who suffered from it, pushing me to think hard about solutions.

I remember years ago, beside the third-largest freshwater lake in China, I saw a whole group of fishermen in small fishing boats. They were using long ladles to scoop out the algae bloom, which was as thick as green paint and had an offensive odor. One fisherman said to me: "When I was young, on a hot day like this, I would jump into the lake for a bath. There were small fish swimming all around." "Now", he said, "those fish have gone, and we are paid to scoop out the algae. I have to stay away from the splash of the lake water, as it may cause my skin to itch." Pointing to the factories along the shorelines, he said that the lake "would not be clean until those chemical plants stop dumping."

Years of research made me understand how hard it is to check the dumping. With weak enforcement, the cost of violations is way too low and those who cut corners often become more competitive in the market. I came to realize that environmental management must go transparent to make sure that the voices of various stakeholders – especially those who suffer from the pollution and damage – could be heard and be considered.

My efforts to engage began with a book, then extended to a website, and now the mobile Internet – as the first product of its kind, our Blue Map app enables users to file micro-reports on social media against polluting factories based on China's new legal requirements for them to disclose online monitoring data every one or two hours. And the violation records and petitions and complaints we compiled based on hundreds of government and corporate sources have been used by multinational and local brands to clean up their supply chains. In some cases, this includes scooping out the toxins and heavy metals dumped in the bottoms of rivers and lakes.

Ladies and Gentleman, in comparison with daunting local environmental challenges and global climate change, our efforts to clean up are still only a drop in the bucket. But I see signs of hope to further scale up, as the vast expansion of environmental transparency in China, rising public awareness, the growing capacity of NGOs and foundations and the rapid development of IT technology, all create a huge potential to green global production, trade and investment.

I thank you all again for your attention and support, and I hope to work with you to motivate more to join the efforts to preserve our beautiful planet earth.