

Congo rainforest defender wins right livelihood prize

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(GIN) – René Ngongo of the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of four winners of this year's Right Livelihood Award, also known as the alternative Nobel Peace Prize.

Ngongo was tapped "...for his courage in confronting the forces that are destroying the Congo's rainforests and building political support for their conservation and sustainable use."

The Congo rainforest, second only to that of the Amazon in global importance, is under grave threat from the aftermath of war, population pressure and corporate exploitation.

Ngongo said his award, to be presented in December, "is a clear message that the campaign ... is starting to be heard around the world" and shows increasing awareness that the disappearance and degradation of forests contribute to climate change.

Ngongo is the founder and coordinator of OCEAN (Organization of ecologists and friends of nature) whose main activities are urban tree-planting, reforestation nurseries for the most threatened species, distribution of improved cooking stoves, education, and advocacy and lobbying on local, national and international level.

Also winning the award was Australian-born Catherine Hamlin, 85, for "restoring the health, hope and dignity of thousands of Africa's poorest women." An obstetrician and gynecologist, she and her late husband founded a hospital where women can seek free treatment for obstetric fistulas — holes that can develop between the birth canal and the bladder or rectum during long and difficult births.

The honorary part of the award - without prize money — went to Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki, 73, for raising awareness of climate change. The Right Livelihood Award Ceremony will take place on Dec. 4, in the Swedish Parliament. Winners receive \$74,000 each.