

Mr. Jim Papoulis, Composer and Founder of the Foundation for Small Voices, USA

Statement at the Launch of Preparations  
for the International Year of Forests 2011

Tuesday, 17 April, 10:00 -11:30 am  
United Nations Forum on Forests

I am honored to stand before you today as your collegial work together has brought you to the moment of addressing the care and strengthening of our combined global futures through the lens of nature.

That this lens opens itself by reflecting on a seedling that may grow, with careful planning and a watchful eye towards the future, **into a forest of saplings by 2011, the international year of the forest, is remarkable.**

A tree stands, as humans do, perfectly balanced between the powerful forces of the gravity on earth and the uplifted-ness of the SKY. As a composer and father, I am frequently reminded of the powerful forces that family, culture, global communities, and nature surround a child with as he or she finds a way in the world.

**You are influential decision makers, well-versed in taking thoughtful actions, and stand balanced between the realities of a planet in transformation at dizzying speeds and the ideals of securing a better world for generations to come.**

My life's work is focused on music and children. As a socially active composer, I travel to meet and compose new songs with children from all over the globe. I have seen hope rise up in the eyes of children who live in extremely challenging situations, as *together* we create a song from nothing more than the seeds of an idea.

Before long, the children reach out to each other to fill in the lyrics, the rhythms, the harmonies of the song. Shoulder to shoulder, they compose a song that speaks to who they are, what they fear, and what they hope for, for themselves, family, friends, and the world beyond.

In a sense, they become a well-balanced ecosystem, a mini-forest, determined to be heard, and to create something at once vital and beautiful.

Through my work with **THE FOUNDATION FOR SMALL VOICES**, In November I had the opportunity to compose with orphans from Tanzania, two weeks ago I was in a small socially diverse town in Canada, and last week I worked with teens living in a dangerous environment in South Chicago;

in the recent past I have composed with children in need from South America, Norway, Bosnia, Ireland, and the People's Republic of China.

They all had VARYING needs, from artistic and basic necessities not being met, as well as the need to simply have attention paid to them. Just as a tree extends its roots deep into the dark richness of the earth while stretching its branches towards the sunlight, bringing forth foliage and fruits, a child takes in the nourishment offered and bears him and herself to the world as best they can.

In all of these songwriting experiences, I have witnessed children eager to be the best that they can be but limited by the adverse circumstances surrounding their childhoods.

I have also seen music touch a place deep within them, as a language that can cross the boundaries of culture, generations, and economics, to leave a light of hope, a sense of confidence alive within each child.

A child, like a tree, needs nourishment to grow and prosper. Without proper feeding and attention, a child may grow, but that growth will be challenged and their potential never fully realized.

I am often surprised that trees can spring up in all sorts of surroundings, from the crevices of a rock formation as well as under the protective covering of the tree from which its seed fell.

The same seems true of children. They are growing up everywhere that they are planted, sometimes fortunate enough to be assisted by an extended family of caregivers and organizations.

There are many fine grassroots and established organizations making a difference in the lives of children in need and I have noticed that there is a common aspect they all share. Trees.

In the middle of very challenged neighborhoods, there are trees. When driving up to the buildings, I am stunned by the attention given to the trees that have been planted outside of the buildings. Perhaps trees have been there before and chopped down. But these clubs and organizations have made an effort to grow a tree, to recognize the close connection between a tree and a life.

The presence of the trees seem to underscore their efforts to tend well to the children in their care, to celebrate life, potential, and the future. Thoughtfully planting a tree, like nurturing a child, is a long process, but so, so vital.

I hope that in some way my work can help children grow into caring, responsible citizens of the world, bearing fruit beyond what we can imagine at the moment, just as planting a tree can bear fruit that we will certainly see in years and generations to come.

I believe that if we all can see the importance of planting a tree, and of nourishing the spirit of a child, that the future will be a much better place. And that should be an essential part that we, as responsible citizens, should place as the highest of goals.