

PRESS RELEASE

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Local Artists and Scientists Confront Climate Change at First-Ever US TippingPoint in Palisades, NY

Sachs: Arts and science collaboration will empower climate change dialogue

Palisades, NY – Monday, December 7, 2009 – The first-ever U.S. TippingPoint is currently underway at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (part of the Earth Institute, Columbia University). Approximately 100 artists and scientists, including Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute, Columbia University, are meeting to explore new possibilities in understanding, interpreting and internalizing the huge challenge of climate change. TippingPoint events have occurred across Europe and have earned recognition from climate change leaders, including The Right Honorable Ed Miliband, the UK's Secretary of State for Environment and Climate Change. The first-ever US event occurs as Miliband and other world leaders arrive in Copenhagen, Denmark, for the UN conference on climate change.

“Confronting climate change is a challenge for all humanity, and everybody can contribute personal and professional skills,” said Dr. Sachs. “The arts are one of the most important ways by which people connect to one another and to humanity as a whole. Scientists are artists in their own way, and interaction between these two fields is a marvelous way to expand the dialogue on climate change, enrich it and ultimately, empower it.”

While at TippingPoint, the participating artists and scientists are engaging in discussions about ways to communicate climate change using the arts. Yesterday, they heard from Dr. Wally Broecker, the Columbia University scientist who coined the term “global warming.” Dr. Broecker implored the artists to take on the role of inspiring the public to act on climate change, especially in the United States, where “we scientists aren’t doing a good job getting the message to the public, two-thirds of whom do not believe that climate change exists.”

“Tipping Point is doing important work in the UK and I am pleased that they have been invited to New York,” said UK climate change minister Ed Miliband. “I believe that we need artists to work with scientists to help us understand the urgency and impact of climate change.”

Participant Laura Kurgan also spoke yesterday. Kurgan is a New York architect whose art installation Exit is currently on display at the U.N. climate change conference at Copenhagen as part of a collection of climate change art called Native Land: Stop Eject. The piece explores the effects of human migration on the environment, using data collected from the Gridded Population of the World project by the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), part of the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

“Arts serve as a resource to communities for demystifying the complexity of science,” said Sandra Gibson, president and CEO of the Association for Performing Arts Presenters. “As a community, we can incorporate climate change messages into our work, and we can also be mindful of ways to confront energy usage by institutions and performing artists. Hopefully, artists can play an essential role in moving the public into action.”

Past TippingPoint conferences in Europe have led organically to the creation of a wide range of work, including sculpture, film and a BBC drama series directed by Oscar-winning (Slumdog Millionaire) Simon Beaufoy.

“It is tremendously exciting to be a part of a conversation with so much potential for a real-world impact,” said Sharon Memis, Director of British Council in the United States. “TippingPoint has provided a forum for collaboration between scientists and artists, two very different communities. Many concrete ideas have emerged during TippingPoint, and I look forward to seeing the results.”

“This is our first experience doing this type of work in the US, and it is exhilarating. The levels of energy liberated by the meeting of these groups is fantastic, and many imaginative ideas are clearly going to come out of these two days,” said Peter Gingold, founder of TippingPoint.

Who are the four organizations sponsoring the event and why are they involved? The first US TippingPoint conference is sponsored by four British and American organizations: TippingPoint, the British Council, the Earth Institute, Columbia University and the CUNY Hunter College Institute for Sustainable Cities.

About TippingPoint: TippingPoint aims to harness the power of the imagination to help stabilize the climate, offering a range of activities centered on exposing creative artists to the enormous challenges of climate change. TippingPoint is network-based organization aiming to be a year round “connector” of the arts and climate science worlds while offering critical and strategic points of engagement through one off events, conferences and public debates.

About British Council: The British Council is the United Kingdom's international non-profit organization for cultural relations and education opportunities. Building people-to-people relationships to tackle climate change is a key priority for the British Council around the world. Our offices in North America also participate in initiatives such as International Climate Champions and Cape Farewell, and we've also developed work around Greening the Arts, notably during the Arts Presenters annual conference in January 2009 and the upcoming ISPA Congress in 2010.

About the Earth Institute, Columbia University: The Earth Institute's overarching mission is to mobilize the sciences, education and public policy to achieve a sustainable Earth. With 850 scientists, postdoctoral fellows, staff and students working in and across more than 30 Columbia University research centers, the Earth Institute is helping to address nine interconnected global issues: climate and society, water, energy, poverty, ecosystems, public health, food and nutrition, hazards, and urbanization.

About CUNY Institute for Sustainable Cities: The Institute for Sustainable Cities at City University of New York, Hunter College, seeks to create awareness and understanding of the connections between the everyday lives of urban citizens and their natural world, leading to the discovery and use of cities like New York as a learning laboratory to create a sustainable future for cities worldwide. The core projects of the Institute, focusing on climate change and energy use, consumption of resources, and cities by the coast, hone in on central issues of societal concern.