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Magsaysay Award goes green: 4 Earth activists get awards

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EARTH HEROES. (From left) Yu Xiaogang, Ma Jun, Ka Hsaw Wa and Antonio Oposa Jr. are honored with this year's Ramon Magsaysay Awards for their efforts to save the environment. **Joe Galvez**

Four of the six Ramon Magsaysay awardees this year have championed environmental causes in their countries, reflecting the rising importance of "green" issues in Asia.

The region's equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded lawyer Antonio Oposa Jr. from the [Philippines](#), Ka Hsaw Wa from Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Yu Xiaogang and Ma Jun from China for their respective work in saving the environment.

Thailand's Krisana Kraisintu and India's Deep Joshi also received the award for developing cheaper medicines and empowering rural communities, respectively.

"The environment happens to emerge as the dominant theme this year," said Emily Abrera, vice chair of the Ramon Magsaysay Awards Foundation (RMAF) Board of Trustees at a press conference Thursday. "I think (environmental concerns are) gonna be the issue for a while."

According to Abrera, the RMAF would no longer give the award according to categories, except for the Emergent Leadership category, and would instead honor

individuals for their outstanding work without limiting awardees in a single field.

Since 1958, 271 individuals and organizations were given Asia's highest honor in the following categories: government service; public service; community leadership; journalism, literature and creative communication arts; and peace and international understanding.

"The problems of the region have changed and it's now the environment," said Dr. Frederico Macaranas, an RMAF board trustee.

According to Macaranas, last year's Magsaysay awardees signed a manifesto on climate change, which would be read at an international forum in Manila next month.



Fellow Ramon Magsaysay Awardees Deep Joshi and Krisana Kraisintu during a press briefing in Manila on Thursday. **Joe Galvez**

Oposa, the lone Filipino awardee this year, won a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 1999 that ordered 12 government agencies to clean up the Manila Bay, the country's largest port, and regularly report their progress to the Court.

On Monday, he filed a new case against 10 other individuals who failed to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling.

"I will withdraw the suit if they (government officials) swim in Manila Bay," Oposa told GMANews.TV.

Chinese environmentalist Yu was recognized for his initiatives to organize communities affected by the construction of a dam in the Lake Lashi area in Yunnan province.

Ma Jun, a former writer for the *South China Morning Post*, was cited for establishing an online database of water pollution information from various Chinese government agencies. To date, Ma's digital map has recorded some 35,000 environmental violations committed by various corporations.

Wa, this year's youngest awardee, sought non-violent channels in exposing and monitoring environmental concerns in Myanmar. The 39-year-old environmentalist founded the non-profit EarthRights, which filed a case against a US-based company responsible for building the Yadana pipeline.

The six 2009 Magsaysay awardees will be formally conferred on August 31 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, where they are expected to deliver a lecture on the issue of their choice. (Find out more about this year's awardees through the RMAF website [here](#).)

Established in 1957, the Ramon Magsaysay Award celebrates the memory and leadership example of the third Philippine President, and is given every year to individuals or organizations in Asia which exemplify the same selfless service that characterized his life.

All Magsaysay awardees receive a certificate, a medallion bearing the likeness of the late president, and an undisclosed cash prize. - **GMANews.TV**

<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/170859/magsaysay-award-goes-green-4-earth-activists-get-awards>