

The 43rd Niwano Peace Prize is hereby awarded to

Mr. Benki Piyãko

Reasons for Selection

Somboon Chungprampree

Chairperson, Niwano Peace Prize Committee

The 43rd Niwano Peace Prize shall be awarded to Mr. Benki Piyãko in recognition of his immense efforts to defend the land and culture of his people, the Indigenous Ashaninka people of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. They have suffered immensely at the hands of invaders and from the destruction of their forests. Mr. Benki Piyãko's commitment over the last 15 years in leading environmental and reforestation projects in service of the Amazon rainforest and his people will endure in the fight against climate change. His efforts as an environmental steward fostering deep connections between humans and nature are felt not just by his surrounding communities, but by communities all over the world, since we are all reliant on a healthy Amazon rainforest for harmonious and sustainable living.

Mr. Benki Piyãko is an Indigenous spiritual leader of the Ashaninka People of the Amônia River, widely recognized as a social entrepreneur, environmental activist, and human rights defender. In his capacity, he founded the Indigenous Ayahuasca Conference, a global platform led by Indigenous peoples to protect the sacred traditions of ayahuasca and the rights of Indigenous communities, while raising Indigenous voices against commercialization and Westernization, as well as the Yorenka Tasorensi Institute, in Marechal Thaumaturgo, Acre State. Through these engagements he is leading efforts focused on reforesting degraded areas, developing sustainable agroforestry and farming systems, and raising awareness amongst local and global societies about environmental protection and the strengthening of Indigenous culture.

As a guardian of the ancestral traditions of his people, Mr. Benki Piyãko is committed to sharing knowledge about the forest, traditional medicine, and Ashaninka spirituality. He is an influential voice in national and international forums and coordinates local and global initiatives focused on environmental protection and the strengthening of Indigenous communities both in Brazil and in other countries. In addition, he is widely recognized for his wisdom, his ability to engage in dialogue, and his unwavering commitment to preserving the planet's environmental and cultural heritage.

As a spiritual leader, Mr. Benki Piyãko created the Yorenka ãtame Center (Forest Knowledge Center) in 2007, by bringing together 80 young people and educating them in forest

preservation. Soon others joined them and by now thousands of people are collaborating to reforest and manage the land. The center has led to remarkable achievements over the last decade, planting over 2 million trees, and making huge strides in animal conservation, protecting species such as turtles, monkeys, wild pigs, tapirs, and wild bees, by mobilizing large groups of young leaders and communities and combining traditional knowledge with modern techniques. The vision exemplified and taught by Mr. Benki Piyāko will play a vital role in securing a peaceful and sustainable future.

His movement is connecting people to the land and the land to its people. He himself believes that he is connected to the spiritual world, which guides him through signs of yes or no, good or bad. His latest initiative is the creation of a Medical Center that will join traditional sciences with the spiritual and healing knowledge of the forest. Cultural and holistic well-being, ecology, as well as traditional knowledge and training are among his key priorities in serving his people.

He was previously honored by the Brazilian Government for his dedication to Human Rights in 2004; he received the Human Rights award in Weimar, Germany, in 2013; and he was awarded the Culture for Peace Award, jointly awarded by the Culture and Diversity Foundation and the Jacques Chirac Foundation in 2020. Additionally, he and his Ashaninka community received the United Nations Development Programme's Equator Prize in 2017 for their collective environmental Programme.

To conclude, Mr. Benki Piyāko is a pioneer in the sustainability and ecology movement at a critical time when the environment and the physical world are in crisis. He is guided by indigenous spirituality and focuses his work – especially with young people – on creating a more conscious relationship with nature in a way that respects the earth and preserves its biodiversity. As founder of the Yorenka Tasorensi Institute, he has established reforestation projects, whilst also focusing on education and community building. In this way, Mr. Benki Piyāko is contributing immensely to the cause of peace through environmental stewardship rooted in traditional wisdom, culture, and spirituality, in alignment with the mission of the Niwano Peace Prize.

It is for these reasons that the Niwano Peace Prize Committee selected Mr. Benki Piyāko to receive the 43rd Niwano Peace Prize.