

## China the root of tree goal

NEW YORK: Nearly 2.6 billion trees have been planted in the past year in China, one of the main reasons that the UN-sponsored Billion Tree Campaign has sprouted to its goal of planting 7 billion trees two months ahead of schedule.

The 7 billion trees represent one tree for every person on the planet. China's mark comes to an average of two trees for every person in the nation.

China came in first on the list of tree-planting countries, said Jia Zhibang, director of the State Forestry Administration.

"As other countries are trying to reach the one-tree-per-person annual target, each Chinese citizen planted more than two trees." The nation's effort is a major boost to the global fight against climate change, he said upon celebrating China's achievement at a ceremony on Monday US time.

The Billion Tree Campaign, launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in November 2006, aims to encourage individuals, communities, businesses and governments to plant trees to counter global warming. Scientists believe that one hectare of trees each year can absorb six tons of carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas.

UNEP set the 7-billion goal - one for every person on the planet - after the 3-billion mark was crossed in March this year thanks to mass plantings by governments and citizens.

About 13 million hectares of trees disappear each year - an area the size of Greece or Nicaragua - due to increasing human consumption and declining ecosystems.

"The Chinese government and people take the responsibility of safeguarding global climate safety seriously," Jia said.

The country has set the target of raising its forest coverage rate from 18 percent to 20 percent until 2010. By 2050, 26 percent of the country's land areas will reportedly be covered by trees.

"Planting trees is the best that China can do to contribute to the fight against climate change," Jia said.

The ceremony on Monday is part of myriad activities during the Global Climate Week that coincides with the UN Summit on Climate Change.

Other guests at the ceremony included Kenyan environmental and political activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai, patron of the Billion Tree Campaign, and Felix Finkbeiner, an 11-year-old boy from Germany who leads the Plant for the Planet initiative. The program's slogan and message to world leaders is: "Stop talking, start planting."

"Talking alone is not going to stop the glaciers from melting," Finkbeiner said.

*Source: Xinhua*