



On Thursday, April 22, 2010, elementary students and facilitators participated in a Mayan ceremony to commemorate Earth Day. Students were reminded of the importance of living in harmony with nature, with ourselves, and with each other.



## Books are made of Trees

On Friday 23, 2010, World Book Day, students and facilitators from the elementary school, as well as librarians, prepared a book exhibit to remind the students of the love and care that Mother Earth

requires of them. In the corridor in front of the library, books were displayed and offered to the students for reading. The different corridors of the school were adorned with quotes about life and nature; many of them from Guatemalan authors and poets.

The Encyclopedia of the Nations describes the current environmental issues as follows:

*Guatemala's main environmental problems are deforestation—over 50% of the nation's forests have been destroyed since 1890—and consequent soil erosion. As recently as 1993, the nation obtained 90% of its energy from wood, losing 40,000-60,000 hectares of forest per year. Between 1965 and 1990, Guatemala also lost over 30% of its mangrove area, which totaled 16,000 hectares in the early 1990. The nation's water supply is at risk due to industrial and agricultural toxins. Guatemala has 27.8 cu mi of water with 74% used for agriculture and 17% used in farming activity. Fifty-seven percent of the people living in rural areas do not have access to pure water, compared with 8% of urban dwellers. Guatemala's cities produce 0.7 million tons of solid waste per year, which, together with thousands of tons of fertilizer annually, contributes to the pollution of the nation's soil. United Nations sources show that environmental contamination is responsible for a significant number of deaths due to respiratory and digestive illnesses. Despite the establishment in 1975 of a ministerial commission charged with conserving and improving the human environment, coordination of antipollution efforts remains inadequate, and Guatemala still suffers from a lack of financial resources and well-trained personnel to implement environmental control programs.*

*In 1994, 12.2% of Guatemala's total land area was protected. In the same year, 10 of Guatemala's 174 animal species and 10 in a total of 900 bird species were considered endangered. Four types of reptiles in a total of 204 and 282 plant species of 8,000 were threatened with extinction. Endangered or extinct species in Guatemala include the horned guan, Eskimo curlew, California least tern, green sea turtle, hawksbill turtle, olive ridley turtle, spectacled cayman, American crocodile, and Morelet's crocodile.*

In an effort to better respond to the classroom environment, the teachers organized a theater workshop. During Earth Day celebration, teachers from the elementary and middle school presented different plays. The students gathered around the courtyard filled with trash.

The play prepared by the elementary school teachers told the story of a tree that sustained life in every form. But life was not respected and cared for. Trash and waste of every kind filled the



land. Due to the polluted environment, a raging waste storm appeared and threatened to destroy the tree. A magician then came into action drawing out characters from an imaginary book, and as these came out, they started picking up the trash while asking the participating



students for ideas on how to change the story, making it brighter with these new ideas on how to love and care for life.

The middle school teachers also presented a play. Several students, through mimic and signs, portrayed the consequences of the lack of organization within a community. Characters in the play wandered around aimlessly, doing nothing about the need for water in the area. With time, the lack of it caused them to fight among themselves for what little water was left. The struggle left everyone without a drop of water. Seeing how drastic their situation had become, the people learned that they had to re-establish their bond with Mother Earth and with one another. The people organized themselves, working together as a community and sharing prudently so that no one would be without water.

