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David Suzuki

Recipient, 2012 Inamori Ethics Prize
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David Suzuki

Recipient of the 2012 Inamori Ethics Prize

A passionate environmentalist, a global leader on issues of sustainable ecology and social justice, and a longtime activist working to address climate change, Dr. David Suzuki is a powerful voice on behalf of biodiversity, future generations, and the planet.

David Suzuki was born in 1936. His parents were first generation Japanese-Canadians whose parents immigrated to Canada from Hiroshima and the Aichi Prefecture, respectively. From an early age, Suzuki understood the imperative of conquering adversity with perseverance. In 1942, the Canadian government sent his father to a labor camp in Solsqua, sold the Suzuki family's dry-cleaning business, and interned Suzuki, his mother, and two sisters in a camp at Slocan in the British Columbia Interior. Suzuki's sister, Dawn, was born in the internment camp. David Suzuki did not speak Japanese like the other interned kids, so he went outside on his own and found solace in nature, an ability he attributed to his father's love of nature. Like many Japanese-Canadians who were interned and had family holdings confiscated or sold, Suzuki was both embittered and emboldened—seemingly intent on proving his worth to society beyond any doubt. Suzuki has stated, “The repercussions of Pearl Harbor were the defining moments in my life.”

After the war Suzuki's family, like other Japanese-Canadian families, was forced to move east of the Rockies. The Suzukis moved to Islington, Leamington, and eventually to London, Ontario. Suzuki attended London Central Collegiate Institute, where in his last year of school he began his social activism and leadership by winning the election to become Student Council President. In 1958, Suzuki received an honors BA in biology from Amherst College of Massachusetts. In 1961, he earned his PhD in zoology from the University of Chicago. Early in his research career he studied genetics. From 1963 until his retirement in 2001, he was a professor in the genetics department and the Sustainable Research Development Institute at the University of British Columbia. Suzuki is currently a professor emeritus.

Suzuki began his environmental advocacy through broadcast media. He is a well-known media figure and has received much praise for his radio and television programs that explain the complexities of the natural sciences in a compelling and easily understood manner. Suzuki has hosted, directed, or

produced over two-dozen series and documentaries focused on the ethics of environmental sustainability. From 1971 to 1972, he was host of *Suzuki on Science*, a children's science program. Since 1979, Suzuki has hosted *The Nature of Things*, a CBC television series that has aired in nearly fifty countries worldwide. Through this program, Suzuki aims to stimulate interest in the natural world, to point out threats to humanity and wildlife habitat, and to present alternatives for achieving a more sustainable society. Suzuki has been a prominent proponent of renewable energy sources and the soft energy path.

Suzuki is also a world-renowned personality in the environmentalist movement and in bioethics circles. In Canada, he tied for fifth place in a 2004 CBC Television poll of Greatest Canadians ever—interestingly, he was the first to make it onto the list while still alive. He has received the highest civilian honors possible for a Canadian: the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. Suzuki is on the Global 500 Roll of Honor, compiled by the UN Environment Program. In 2009, he was presented with the Honorary Right Livelihood Award.

Suzuki's more recent championship of initiatives attempting to slow the damage caused by climate change has also brought him international attention. In 1990, he cofounded the David Suzuki Foundation to work with government, businesses, and individuals to conserve our environment by providing science-based education, advocacy, and policy work, and to act as a catalyst for the social change that today's situation demands. The foundation's main missions are transforming the economy, protecting the climate, reconnecting with nature, and building communities of individuals who live healthier, more fulfilled, and just lives.

His foundation has worked with the Ainu of Japan to protect salmon, as well as with the indigenous peoples of Columbia, and the Kayapo people of Brazil. Suzuki led a research project to explore the impact of a dam in Australia and worked with the Hesquiat people of Vancouver Island to restore a clam fishery. With each of these projects, his foundation partnered with community members to develop alternative models of economic and community development. In 1992, Dr. Suzuki and members of the David Suzuki Foundation team wrote the *Declaration of Interdependence* for the United Nations' Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This *Declaration* was the seminal document that spurred efforts promoting peace, sustainability, global interconnectedness, reverence for life, and unity within the climate change community. It became the inspiration for the Earth Charter, whose adherents are still growing. Suzuki's climate change team has since expanded into the health

arena, working with doctors to fight for clean air, while publishing energy solutions and lobbying successfully for Canada to sign the Kyoto Accord.

Informed by his experience as a Japanese-Canadian during WWII, Suzuki speaks out against racial discrimination and for minority rights. When Suzuki lived in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was appalled by the treatment of African Americans there and joined the NAACP in an effort to demonstrate his solidarity with others who also experienced racism. Ultimately, he moved back to Canada when he could not foresee discrimination lifting in the United States. He has been consistently involved in the civil rights movement throughout his career, seeking justice and respect for all peoples of the Earth.

Suzuki's written work includes more than fifty-four books, nineteen of them for children. He has also authored over three hundred popular articles. Some of his more recent book titles include, *The Legacy: An Elder's Vision for Our Sustainable Future*, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*, and *More Good News: Real Solutions to the Global Eco-Crisis*.

Suzuki's most recent film, *Force of Nature*, was the winner of the People's Choice Documentary Award at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival. *Force of Nature* offers a glimpse into the events that shaped David Suzuki's life and career. The film weaves together scenes from the places and events that shaped Suzuki's life, with a filming of his Last Lecture, which he describes as "a distillation of my life and thoughts, my legacy, what I want to say before I die."

Dr. David Suzuki has dedicated his life to giving a voice to the voiceless and disregarded. He currently lives in Vancouver, Canada, with his wife, Tara Cullis. He is the father of five children. He has said, "however many years I have left, each one will be a gift."