

# Environmentally-literate global citizens

*That's what we should all be, says B.I.O. founder*

By Angelike Contis

**“B**ios” (“life”) is the magic word for Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis. For the last 20 years, she’s campaigned to make the preservation of Earth’s jeopardised “bios” a priority. In 1985 she founded the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) to administer what she often calls the “vaccine” of ecological thinking to the world.

Today the Athens-based non-profit organization has its own virtual university and 124 member countries. Its activities – and especially the organisation’s role in influencing decision-makers – earned B.I.O.’s creator the Biopolicy Award 2004 from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences and the BioFocus Foundation.

There’s no time for resting on laurels, however. Even if you catch Vlavianos-Arvanitis in the middle of one of her 18-hour days, she’s crystal clear about her mission. “What we are asking for is to create a new structure for society.” The veteran public speaker laughs, adding, “As little as that!” The biologist, who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace prize multiple times says: “The continuity on our planet of ‘bios’ is threatened by human arrogance. This over-consumerism and arrogance that we have in our behaviour is threatening so many forms of life and so many aspects of the fantastic balance that exists. And here we are. We see it and we don’t care about destroying it.”

Though she’s adamant about the danger, the B.I.O. founder says: “We’re not saying to start a revolution, but to have an evolution of ideas.” This clearly requires patience, perseverance and diplomacy. She doesn’t launch into critiques of local eco-politics, but instead speaks of B.I.O.’s “outstanding friends” around the world in business, government and other fields. She points out: “We don’t threaten any vested interests”. Instead, B.I.O. invites business people to factor in the environment when calculating profit. It urges governments to take it into account on all levels. For instance, though her site points out war’s damaging environmental side-effects, the B.I.O. founder envisions militaries “planting trees” and using “tanks that clean the soil.” B.I.O.



**Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis with the President of the World Academy of Art and Science Dr. Walter Anderson and Academicians Heden and Norbi.**

awards have been given to the late marine explorer Jacques Cousteau and media mogul Ted Turner alike.

Vlavianos-Arvanitis wants everyone involved. In 1991 she established the International University for the Bio-Environment, “not to give degrees” but to encourage institutions “to rethink and re-plan”. In the face of over-specialisation, it offers a cross-disciplinary environmental education. The newest of over a dozen free textbooks published by B.I.O. is an 880-page “Bio-Syllabus for European Environmental Education”. Vlavianos-Arvanitis proudly flips through it, pointing to sections like Bio-Health and Bio-Architecture. B.I.O. also offers e-learning courses. According to the organisation’s site ([www.biopolitics.gr](http://www.biopolitics.gr)), everyone – whether a president or fisherman – needs to become an “environmentally-literate global citizen”.

She says: “This would create a system of values. Then we would not say, ‘It’s not pertinent to me.’” One EU-funded B.I.O. programme involves the education of young farmers.

B.I.O.’s most recent meetings have ranged from a Greek-Turkish conference in Athens to the 9th Annual Youth Bios Olympiad in St. Petersburg.

Despite having only a handful of staffers, the non-profit has many long-term campaigns. These include: a

“green salary” for unemployed youth; accessibility for those with special needs; a bio-assessment of technology; and gene banks of plant seeds. B.I.O. helped make a 1993 UN Olympic Truce resolution happen.

It still lobbies for an International Court for the Environment and an environmental Bank of Ideas. Vlavianos-Arvanitis has drawn up a scheme for the Environmental Olympics, which she hopes Beijing will adapt. After an international selection process, “medals” would be given to people in each profession who contribute the most to “bios”. Since 1992, the group has invited the entire global population to vote “Yes” on a referendum to save the environment. (It’s possible to do so on the B.I.O. website).

In assessing B.I.O.’s accomplishments to date, Vlavianos-Arvanitis points to the ripple-effects of education and advice to organisations and governments. She remains an optimist, noting that maybe each of us only adds a “little speck of sand”, but eventually, “We can build a pyramid.”



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