

A SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF COMMEMORATING THE FIRST MEMORIAL ANNIVERSARY OF THE LATE PROF. WANGARI MUTA MAATHAI HELD AT THE GARDENS OF GREEN BELT MOVEMENT OFFICES IN KILIMANI, NAIROBI ON THE 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2012.

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Addressing the distinguished and all invited guests he said,

In 1981 Mr Njehu Gatabaki the Editor of the Kenya News wrote to Prof Maathai and stated as follow: “At the same time we wish to express our appreciation for your courageous conduct in times of unprecedented ridicule mounted against you

Your contribution to scholarship and educational service to this country is immense, and should be recognized by people of vision and nobler ideals. You have our Support. Njehu Gatabaki, Editor-in-Chief, Kenya News (1981)”

This prayer by Mr Gatabaki came to pass in 2004 when she was recognized and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee. Prof Wangari Muta Maathai was awarded the prestigious award, becoming the first African Woman and the Ninth African to be so honoured. Besides being an accomplished scholar and educationist as Gatabaki mentioned in his letter to her, Prof Wangari Muta Maathai made her mark as uncompromising and courageous environmental conservationist, an ardent human rights crusader, and a champion for democracy as well as a principled politician. As such, Prof. Maathai reasserted the place of Kenya on global map and secured our pride as a nation.

Indeed Wangari was so concerned about the peace and wellbeing of this Nation that in 2005, she cancelled a high profile tour which had been organized for her by my Mentor, Prof Peter Gehr in Switzerland. In this tour she was scheduled to address parliament and meet other highly placed dignitaries in the Government in addition to giving a Lecture to University of Bern students’ body. This was at the height of the 2005 Banana and Orange Campaigns. Writing to Peter to cancel this engagement she stated.

“I hope this finds you well. Many of you may already be aware that Kenya has been carrying out a constitutional review. Unfortunately as the process comes to an end it has become very divisive and threatens the unity of the country. I therefore regret to inform you that I have to cut short my tour and return to Kenya with immediate effect. I know that this will adversely affect your program and I am deeply disturbed by it. Nevertheless, I am sure that you will understand my dilemma. Wangari Maathai, Monday, 03 Oct 2005.

It is no wonder then that in February 2010, the University of Nairobi appointed her the Founder Distinguished Chair of the newly established Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and

Environmental Studies, an Institute created in honour of her as alumni of the University of Nairobi. Wangari was also instrumental in its establishment and the development of its mission and vision. This Institute was very close to her heart. She saw in it a real possibility of training transformational leaders and change agents that will bridge theory and practice in the fields of peace and environment governance. During the inaugural Board Meeting held on Tuesday March 09, 2010 Prof. Maathai requested for a moment to sing the song “Amazing Grace” to reflect the journey of the Institute. The Board members joined her in singing the first three (3) stanzas of the song.

I quote here the third stanza:

*"Through many dangers, toils and snares...
we have already come.
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far...
and Grace will lead us home."*

She also expressed how grateful she was to Prof George Magoha, Vice Chancellor University of Nairobi in whose leadership the Institute was founded.

When awarding her the Peace Prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee noted, and I quote;

“Peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment. Maathai stands at the front of the fight to promote ecologically viable social, economic and cultural development in Kenya and in Africa. She has taken a holistic approach to sustainable development that embraces democracy, human rights and women's rights in particular. She thinks globally and acts locally.”

Therefore, it is not by accident that the mission of Wangari Maathai Institute is:

To cultivate positive ethics, values and practices towards the environment by training stewards who foster peace, holistic sustainable development and link theory with practice -

and thus in our own small way ensure her legacy is not extinguished but more “Wangaris” are nurtured to continue with her work. We owe it to ourselves and future generations to continue with the Legacy of Wangari Maathai. She left behind a rich legacy on which we as a people can draw inspiration and guidance. For as she often told in her now famous Humming bird’s story- I’ll do the best I can. Let us all say on all those issues she cared deeply about. “I will do the best I can..... I will do the Best I can... I will do the Best I can. And thus contribute in the healing of the Earth

Thank you all.