

A SPEECH DURING THE INAUGURAL WANGARI MAATHAI AWARD WHICH WAS PRESENTED IN ROME I TO RECOGNIZE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN FORESTS AND TO HONOUR THE MEMORY OF THE GLOBAL ICON, PROF. WANGARI MUTA MAATHAI. (27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2012.)

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Narayan Kaji Shrestha, a Nepalese activist won the inaugural Wangari Maathai Award which was presented in Rome on September 27th 2012. Mr Shrestha was recognized for his work with women and low-caste villagers for more than three decades. “Narayan Kaji Shrestha’s work captures the spirit of Wangari Maathai” said FAO Assistant Director-General for forestry Eduardo Rojas-Briales.

The Wangari Maathai Award was established by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to recognize efforts to improve and sustain forests and to honour the memory of the global icon. Prof. Kiama Gitahi, the Acting Director of Wangari Maathai was invited to participate in the award Ceremony.

Addressing the distinguished guest during this meeting, he said;

“I am aware of the high requirements that were set to identify the winner of such a prestigious award, as well as the immense expectations placed on whoever wins an award such as this one.

In her book Replenishing the Earth“she states the following about awards ---*The church partly invented the concept of sainthood to express gratitude to often wealthy or noble people who had served the poor and the sick. The designation of sainthood indicated to other faithful that these men and women were heroes and heroines to be thanked, respected, and emulated. ....I have been fortunate to have my work recognized. Such acknowledgement, through award, citation or even a kind word, can be extremely encouraging. It helps to provide the courage to continue one’s work in difficult or even threatening circumstances”*

Thus I believe the beneficiary of Wangari Maathai Award today is being told loudly: “We have observed your walks and your work and you have contributed to healing the earth. We appreciate and are grateful for what you have done and we would like you to continue. We from Wangari Maathia Institute, University of Nairobi are honored to celebrate this award with you today”.

Thank you all.