

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY; WANGARI MAATHAI!**

### *Our Friend, our Mother, our Comrade, our Sheroe, our Sister, our Mentor ....*

Today the 1<sup>st</sup> of April; 2023 is Professor Wangari Maathai's birthday, she would have been eighty-three (83) years and knowing her, I am sure she would still be championing for peace across the globe with zeal and fervour, but even more importantly, she would be very concerned at what is currently happening in Kenya and her voice would have joined or be leading those calling for dialogue and for a peaceful solution to the challenges currently facing Kenya. Her voice, her actions, her interventions came at a high personal cost, but she was insistent on peaceful and non-violent solutions. Her personal view of peace was not preserved to the normal definitions connected to conflicts or absence of active war, it was broad-based and holistic, in high consideration of environmental sanity and protection of biodiversity as this was linked to global warming, democratic and progressive leadership and human rights which ensured that all people were treated with dignity and respect.

Wangari specifically; had a passion for the youth, women and persons who lived in the margins as well as the place of culture in sustainable peace. This was acknowledged by the Nobel Committee, in 2004 when she became the first African women to win the Nobel Prize and also the first Environmentalist. The Committee observed that "Maathai's mobilisation of African women was not limited in its vision to work for sustainable development; she saw tree-planting in a broader perspective which included democracy, women's rights, and international solidarity". The Nobel Committee noted that Wangari thought globally and acted locally with a great multiplier effect. It is against these range of critical issues and engagement that she received her Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 thus in her own words "there can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and

peaceful space”. Indeed, this aligns well with the current 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which premise general wellbeing and peace to sustainable development.

Climate change has now become the defining issue of our time and one of the biggest threats to humanity. According to ReliefWeb (May,2022), over 38 million people were newly displaced by climate-related disasters in 2021 across 141 countries and territories. This directly affects the enjoyment of the rights to adequate housing, education, health and security, among others. Majority of the displaced are in Africa, the continent hardest and earliest hit than any other, especially in conflict and violence. The discussion on climate change at international level often revolves around predictions on future consequences and the perceived threat of increasing extreme weather events and its effects. The climate consequences are already very much a present lived experience among African people. Across the continent, climate risk is exacerbating existing poverty and inequality, food insecurity, fragile ecosystems, and water scarcity.

In April, 2022, a Blog in the UN Climate Change was explaining “The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution is increasingly affecting the human rights of people across the globe. From climate change induced drought that is precipitating hunger and famine around the world, to pollution that is contaminating water sources everywhere, the global environmental crisis is disproportionately impacting the world’s most marginalized communities”. Wangari in majority of her speeches and writings continually expressed this nexus, which is only being acknowledged globally in recent times.

We at the Wangari Maathai Foundation continue to celebrate her achievements and commitment to a better world, more importantly, we exist to amplify and champion the legacy of this renown Nobel Laureate who distinguished herself in every area she touched, be it the academics, human rights, environment, politics, women rights, peace and security and so on and on. Wangari did not

wait for change, she caused it, she was the change agent, she changed her world and her footprints are still visible.

Since 2015, the Foundation has invested in future leaders through the building of character and personal leadership with the aim of achieving a fairer society. This is well captured in her formative interventions which envisioned a world in which individuals especially the young generation acknowledge their capacity to be a force for positive transformation. This is through supporting ideas and initiatives that demonstrate that each of us, no matter how small, can make a difference. In this regard the Foundation has cultivated partnerships and facilitated dialogues with a broad range of actors to build social and emotional competencies, empower self-development and engender collective action in the next generation.

Moving forward, the Foundation will be launching its second strategic plan on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April which is the International Mother Earth Day (formally known as the International Earth Day) whose theme is very relevant to where our 2023-2028 strategy is headed, ‘**Invest in our planet**’. We shall be seeking local, national, regional and global support towards the implementation of a most efficiently and diligently developed Five-Year strategy, the Wangari Maathai style using the “Power of One” as a solution multiplier viz a viz the risk multiplier of climate change!

With the Mission of ‘*Advancing the legacy of Prof. Wangari Maathai by catalysing purposeful and courageous leadership*’, we hope to broaden our influence, fortify our alliances, and guarantee the longevity of our programs through this strategic plan.

Wangari literally invested her life from a young age in this planet! On this 1<sup>st</sup> of April as we celebrate the day God gave her to the world, and in the run-up to the International Mother Earth Day, let us begin to contemplate what each of us shall “Invest in the Planet”!

Wangari Maathai Foundation will walk with those willing to take up this challenge.

See you on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April!

**Njeri Kabeberi**  
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