

SPEECH BY ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTRY, CABINET SECRETARY, HON. KERIAKO TOBIKO, CBS, SC, DURING THE AFRICA ENVIRONMENT DAY /WANGARI MAATHAI DAY CELEBRATION HELD ON 3RD MARCH, 2021 AT MICHUKI MEMORIAL PARK IN NAIROBI COUNTY

French Ambassador to Kenya

Aline Kuster-Menager

UN-Habitat Executive Director

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif

Chief of Kenya Defense Forces

Gen. Robert Kariuki Kibochi

The Vice-Chancellor University of Nairobi;

Prof Gitahi Kiama

Members of the Green Belt Movement Board

Director Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental studies; Prof. Mungai

The Representative of the Wangari Maathai Foundation; Ms. Wanjiru Mathai

Distinguished Guests Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me immense pleasure to join you today to commemorate the 9th Wangari Maathai Day. This is the day we pay tribute to the green legacy of the 2004, Nobel Peace Laureate the late Prof Wangari Maathai. During this day we also celebrate Africa Environment Day and World Wildlife Day (WWD).

This year, the theme is 'Reimagining the Future: Clean and Green Cities for All. Build Back Better'. The theme calls for urgent need building and maintain green, safe, clean, resilient, accessible, culturally relevant and sustainable cities in the context of sustainable development. It also draws attention to the pressing environmental challenges facing the continent today.

Today we celebrate a heroine and a founder of the Green Belt Movement which has grown to become a power house in championing Environment protection and conservation. Professor Maathai will always be remembered for her enormous

contribution to environmental sustainability through the protection, conservation and sustainable development of Environment and natural resources in Kenya, Africa and around the world.

Indeed, her life was a series of firsts: the first woman to gain a Ph.D. in East and Central Africa; the first female chair of a department at the University of Nairobi; and the first African woman and the first environmentalist to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (2004). Professor Maathai was also the author of four books including her autobiography.

Today we are holding this commemoration in one of our Green spaces in Nairobi the Michuki Park which is also an urban forest. These green spaces have helped our people, communities by providing them with conducive environment to relate and relax with their families during the lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic.

Recently, green spaces have gained popularity as environmental conservancy sites. Many cities around the world are using their green spaces to educate the public on the importance of environmental conservation. These Green spaces are ecological reserves, in which an ecosystem is shielded from urban development or certain species of plants/animal are protected from poaching. In this regards Cities can grow and transform without necessarily undercutting the natural environment; in fact, green spaces show that cities and ecosystems can coexist alongside one another. Keeping this in mind is vital to the future of urban development.

The Government plans to conduct an inventory of all its green and public spaces to address the deficiency of information regarding the exact number of green and public spaces, and the state they are in. This will help in developing an evidence-based strategy and policy for the protection, revitalization, creation, management, and enjoyment of public spaces, and their restoration across the country.

The government plans to revive the green renaissance' in the city and across the country as part of its strategy to attain and maintain the 10% tree cover target by 2022. Last month UNEP launched a major report titled Making Peace with Nature, which provides a comprehensive blueprint for solving the triple planetary emergencies of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

We are deeply concern with how Humanity is waging war on nature but the good news that we can transform our relationship with nature to secure a sustainable future and prevent future pandemics. Therefore, we need to reimagine and transform our collective responsibility towards safeguarding our environment under the clarion call of my environment my responsibility.

Our green spaces face complex challenges such as pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, inadequate infrastructure and rapidly growing

populations. Therefore, it is imperative to invest in green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in these environments is clear.

“Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come”

THANK YOU