Remarks By

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&

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Wangari Maathai Day, World Wildlife Day & Africa Environment Day

**Nairobi National Park**

March 3, 2015

* Your Excellency the President of this great Republic Of Kenya
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On behalf of the Green Belt Movement and my immediate family, my brothers (Waweru here with us) and Muta who is out of the country, my father (Mr. Mwangi Mathai), husband (Lars) and our two daughters, Ruth & Elsa, accept our sincere gratitude for coming to mark 3 very important days in our annual calendar:

Who ever thought of bringing these 3 days together was actually brilliant – many of us probably wondered how they are connected…..here’s how:

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, there was no greater advocate for the African Environment than our mother, Prof. Wangari Muta Maathai. She committed her entire life to protecting and advocating for the natural environment in Kenya and across the continent. She deeply believed that our survival was inextricably linked to, and dependent on, the survival of our environment. Many of us remember the role Wangari Maathai played as the Goodwill Ambassador for the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem, having been appointed to this role by 11 Heads of State of the Congo Basin Region. It was a badge she wore with great honor and responsibility. As Kenyans and Africans, we know that the ultimate celebration of the African environment is our amazing and diverse wildlife. Linking Wangari Maathai, the African Environment, and the World’s Wildlife is therefore a triple victory!

I am proud to stand here before you today as the Chair of the Green Belt Movement. An organization that my mother and her close friends started close to 40 years ago. I know you will agree with me that Kenyans are today some of the most environmentally conscious people in the world because of the work that this great organization does. Around the world nations are fighting to protect green spaces. We are lucky to live in “the green city in the sun”. Let’s keep it that way!

The last 3 years, have been difficult for GBM – facing the loss of our Founder was something we had not expected to happen so soon. But I want to salute the commitment and resilience of the Board of the GBM that steered the organization through a difficult transition. Your Excellency we were told, many times, that organizations rarely survive the loss of their Founders. We did, and we have. (APPLAUSE)

Today, the Green Belt Movement is undergoing a resurgence, expanding its work in restoring degraded forests and protecting public land, including in a partnership with the Ministry of Energy. In this project, the Green Belt Movement is setting the standard of excellence in landscape restoration. I also salute the incredible staff of GBM who have ensured that GBM thrives under the able leadership of our Executive Director, Ms. Aisha Karanja (who is also here today). We face the future with great optimism and vitality.

With the fight to save Karura Forest, standing with the mothers of political prisoners in Freedom Corner, and stopping the grabbing of Uhuru Park and Jevanjee Gardens, among others, my mother and the GBM charted a path and inspired generations of Kenyans, and people around the world, to stand up for their rights and protect the commons.

Your Excellency, ladies & gentlemen, I am happy to share that the legacy of Professor Wangari Muta Maathai continues to grow and expand. In 2009, the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies (WMI) was established as a partnership between the University of Nairobi and the Green Belt Movement (the first of it’s kind to link an institution of higher learning and an Non-Governmental Organization). The WMI is situated at the College of Agriculture & Veterinary Studies, Upper Kabete Campus (thanks to the support of Former VC George Magoha and Principal Dr. Agnes Mwang’ombe, and the continued support of the current VC, Dr. Peter Mbithi). The Institute is well on it’s way to being a center of excellence in experiential learning - an approach that bridges the gap between knowledge and practice. The Institute continues to grow and today boasts 19 Masters and 11 PhD Students. The Institute also collaborates with a number of international Institutions including United Nations Environment Program, the University of Copenhagen, the US Department of State, The Energy Reosurces Institute, and the University of Tokyo. Thanks to the Kenyan Government and Former President Mwai Kibaki, the Wangari Maathai Institute will soon have its own campus.

Your Excellency, the latest, and very exciting, legacy project currently in development is a partnership between the Green Belt Movement and our family. This new partnership will see the development of a living memorial center – The **Wangari Muta Maathai House**. We envision that this place will serve to inform, inspire and move people to action. The House will exhibit for the Kenyan, African and global public, for the very first time, Wangari Muta Maathai’s speeches, video recordings, international recognitions and awards, including the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. The Wangari Maathai House will facilitate a journey through Wangari Maathai’s life and invite people to reflect on their own commitment to action. The House will go a long way in inspiring people to secure the future of Africa’s environment and the World’s Biodiversity, including Wildlife.

The **Wangari Muta Maathai House** will particularly focus on programming for our young people, inspiring them to live lives of purpose and commitment. As a family sharing our mother – her work, writings, and awards - to the Kenyan public and the world gives us a sense of great satisfaction. We are grateful to the Green Belt Movement family for their enthusiasm in this partnership. We are currently in the planning stages of this legacy project and welcome the support of all Kenyans. We especially look forward to involving your good government, your Excellency, our vibrant private sector and the Kenyan public. Together we can realize this Kenyan story and inspire the world as we do it.

Thank you most sincerely for the privilege of being here today to speak on behalf of the larger Wangari Maathai family, the Green Belt Movement, and all our friends who have walked with us and seen us through to this sunny day! Happy Wangari Maathai Day, Happy Africa Environment Day and Happy World Wildlife Day!

And as Mommy would have reminded us to do today – don’t forget to plant a tree (or two!)

Thank you very much.