

Nehemiah Rotich – Introduction

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My job this morning is really to introduce Professor Wangari Maathai. As we all know the purpose of us having Maathai is to listen to her. I will therefore not spend a lot of time to say things about her, say to her, about to herself. When I surfed through the various sites on the internet, I actually found a summary of slightly more than 3 pages and I'm not going to really go through all that. I would encourage all of us to go through this and I will make available to you [indistinguishable] the summary of what I have. But all of us can of course go to the websites and look. Professor Maathai is the founder of the Greenbelt Movement, she is an environmentalist, she is a civic society and women's health activist and Nobel Laureate. However, these are (respective of?) many hats she wears both in the recent past and at present. Notably the greatest achievement she contributed to the earth and the earth's citizens would be the formation of the Greenbelt Movement. As a long time campaigner of the environment her message has inspired millions around the globe to care for our planet by promoting environmental sustainability and conservation. I think most importantly she has been very pivotal and very inspiring particularly by putting communities on board in these issues of the environment. And in that respect she was among some of the top people in the world to realize that poverty was a major component that contributed to environmental degradation. As you all know, she's been recognized for her [indistinguishable] in struggles. I personally remember her on many occasions when she even had to use herself to defend the trees before the bulldozers that had appeared here in the [indistinguishable]. She has been, or she was the first woman in east and central Africa to earn her PhD. And this is really very remarkable indeed. She has also been a member of parliament [indistinguishable] and she has used that opportunity to also speak to legislators and politicians, both in Kenya and across the world. In 2006, the president of France, Jacques Chirac, honored Maathai with France's highest honor. And after all that, she moved on and got her Women's, I mean her colleagues, to create what has been known as Nobel Women's Initiative. And this she did with the Nobel Prize winner laureates Williams, Ebadi, Menchú, Maguire. On the part of UNEP, Maathai has really also been very instrumental and this has been a lot of motivation for us in UNEP. For example, one idea that she picked up, which we have all been talking about as environmentalists over the years, is the aspect of the three Rs, which is reduce, reuse, and recycle. And she decided that she wanted to add [indistinguishable] to this and she put up the word repair in which case we are supposed to repair resources where it's necessary. And I think in respect to that she has actually an ambition on this in which she says her [indistinguishable], or her inspiration for this is to continue planting trees. In a program that she has inspired in UNEP, this is what has been called Billion Tree Campaign. This Billion Tree Campaign has already led to planting of hundreds of millions of trees across the globe and I think we are very soon getting to one billion. She has also been appointed, in 2005, as the goodwill ambassador, or the roving ambassador, for the Congo Basin Initiative. And in this regard, she has been recognized and requested to do for the Congo Basin what she has been able to do elsewhere in the world and that is to play an activist role for the region's conservation and protection. And the Congo Basin, for those of you who may not be very much Basin forests are second to the Amazon in terms of being the most appropriate ecosystem that would possibly play a very big role in climate change [video cuts to Wangari Maathai speaking].