

Wangari Maathai

Thank you very much my brother, Dr. Nehemiah Rotich, for that wonderful introduction. I'm extremely privileged to be here today and I want to join all others in welcoming you. Many of you have sure come from outside of this region so we want to welcome you to this part of Africa, especially here in Tanzania. I want to recognize my friend Martha Honey, who is the coordinator of the Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development along with the school director Dr. William Durham, and all the organizers of the conference who have made it possible for us to meet here in Arusha. We have been talking about this opportunity for several years, several months now, when we traveled to the U.S. we have met Martha and she has always reminded me "Don't forget we are meeting in Arusha." So I was very excited when finally the day came and I was indeed here. I was going to recognize the presence of many of our friends here. A good number of you we have worked together for so many years and it is good to see you here in Arusha.

Now let me start with the message that I have been trying to deliver in the world, which is the message that the Norwegian Nobel committee was delivering to the world when they decided to give the prize to me, to the environment, and to open up a new era. People who have studied the history of the Norwegian Nobel committee, and especially the peace award, know that it started from certain grounds and it continued to expand and to try to educate us, as was the spirit of Nobel, to see how we could promote peace in the world. That was the vision of the founder of the prize, of the prizes. This particular prize, which was given to the Norwegian people to manage, is a prize where Nobel wanted it to promote the concept of peace and to promote peace because as you know he's the founder of dynamite. And, of course, he just said he wanted to promote peace, and at that time, some 100 years ago, he had, I'm sure there were many ways in which he could think of how we can promote peace. But as years have gone by, the committee recognized that there are many ways in which you can promote peace. You can promote peace also by preempting the causes of conflict. And that is why, at a certain stage, they also recognize people who worked for human rights, people who promoted justice, people who advocated for democracy. And that's why we saw people like Nelson Mandela being recognized for a long time campaign for justice for respect for human rights. Or people like Desmond Tutu, or people like Dr. Martin Luther King. And in 2004, the committee recognized that sustainable management of the environment, sustainable management of the resources that we have on this planet earth, limited resources that we have on this planet. If they're not managed in a responsible way, if they're not managed in an accountable way, if they are not shared in an equitable way, they precipitate conflicts and wars. And indeed when you look at many of the wars we are fighting, whether it is in DNC, in Darfur, and many other places in the world, they are over the access, the control, the distribution of resources. So the message that the Norwegian Nobel Committee was pushing

or was striving to deliver to the world was the message that we need to change our mindset about the resources that we have: how we manage them, how we distribute them, how we share them. And also to encourage that in order for us to be able to do that, we need to economically and politically manage ourselves in a certain way, and for lack of a better word, in a more democratic way. And so they linked the sustainable management of resources, good governments and peace. These three have to be managed together so that we can put more peace on the world.

Now this is not an easy concept to understand and of course it is not easy always to convince the world and the people that we need to change our mindset. And recently the world, well it is still going through, a huge financial crisis. As I tried to analyze the financial crisis in my simple minded way, I could easily see that at the very top, those people were managing their, the financial, the world finances. We are constantly being told that they went overboard; that they did not manage the resources in a responsible way, in an accountable way. And they certainly did not share those resources in an equitable way. And if you follow the discussions especially in the United States, where recently for example the banks, and even the motor industry was being asked by the Senate “Could you explain how you will use the money?” That means they were being asked, “Could you explain how accountable you will be with the resources you want the states to give you? Could you show how responsible you will be?” And then it was very interesting because in the discussions – it was on CNN – and the CNN was showing the private jets in which these CEOs had arrived in Washington DC. And the comment on it was, “Are you really going to give the amount of money to these CEOs who have arrived in this city in private jets? Are you giving money to go to rescue the banks, to go to rescue the small people, to go to rescue the communities whose livelihoods are threatened, or are you giving the money to go and sustain this high lifestyle of the CEOs?” So for me, it’s very clear that unless the resources are managed in a responsible way, in an accountable way, and they are shared in an equitable way, sooner or later the system will collapse. And of course, fortunately, at that level, you had the whole government of the United States of America and you had the whole world. Later, we saw twenty most powerful countries economically meeting in Washington DC to try to see how they can save the financial system of the world.

But for many of us at the grassroot, many of us in the developing countries, we collapsed a long time ago. We live from hand to mouth. The only thing is there was no place to go to. We didn’t have a congress, we didn’t have a G20 to call to try to rescue and therefore, what we do at the grassroot level, what we do at a region like this, is we go at each other’s throats and we begin to blame each other. We blame our politicians, we blame our communities, we blame each other, and at a critical level we start wars with our communities. We blame our president because we say the president with his community, with his tribe is taking the resources from the rest of us. And before you know it, we have conflicts in the Congo, we have conflicts in Chad, we have conflicts in Liberia, we have conflicts in Somalia because we are blaming each other. But essentially what happened to us was happening to the world a few weeks ago and still happening but fortunately at that level people can see and governments respond. At our level hardly anybody responds. So I think the message of the Norwegian Nobel committee is an extremely relevant

message, but I'm sure it will take time for people to make the link that the committee made: the link between sustainable management of the resources that we have, good governments and peace.

Now, when we started the Greenbelt Movement, of course we did not have the clarity that the committee had. We were trying to deal with the issues as we saw them at the grassroots level. And without going into the details of the Greenbelt Movement because we recently produced a book, and if you could go to our website greenbeltmovement.org I'm sure you can get a lot of this information. But in a nutshell, the Greenbelt Movement was intended to respond to the failed needs of communities and especially the failed needs of women because we are doing this in the national concept of women of *[indistinguishable]*. And the failed needs at that time were the need for energy, which was largely firewood, the need for clean drinking water, which eventually led us to begin campaigning to protect rivers, to protect forests because if you destroy your forest then of course as we all know eventually you will have no clean drinking water. But ordinary people don't make the link. The other one was to have adequate nutritious food at the household level. That eventually led us to the campaign to conserve the soil because one of the largest, to me one of the greatest threats to Africa today is the loss of topsoil. And if you fly in Africa today, everywhere is brown with silt. And that's one of the most important natural resources that we are losing. And without the soil, you cannot grow food. Eventually when you are left with sand or rocks, you can only rely on food aid. So protecting the soil eventually was the response of the Greenbelt Movement to the failed needs of the grassroots communities for adequate nutritious foods. And the other one, the other need that women had expressed was the need for income. And that need for income eventually made us decide we would plant the trees with the women largely because we were the International Council of Women but also because, in this region, it is the women who do a lot of work in the field, it is also the women who fetch firewood, who fetch water. So it was much easier to give the message to the women. So we planted trees and for every tree that survives, we promised that if you plant a tree and you look after it, if it survives we will compensate you. It's a very small financial compensation which now serves as an incentive to keep their interest going. Otherwise, they will tell you they have other things to do. Remember you're working with people who are poor and who want an income, who don't make more than a dollar a day probably, and so you need to give them an incentive to stay with it and look after that tree because it takes time.

And so the Greenbelt Movement eventually became a vehicle for us to deliver messages not only to the local communities we are working with but eventually also to the government. You know that we count on the government to govern, to manage our resources, to govern in a responsible way, to manage our resources in a responsible and in an accountable way, and to promote equity in the distribution of those resources. And that was an extremely important message for us because we had come to realize that we go at each other's throats when we think that "my neighbor is being favored." So in a place where we have tribes, we have communities and our politics are very focused on tribes and communities, it was very important for us to promote government systems that promote equity. And when you don't have equity or when you give politicians an opportunity to believe that you don't have equity, politicians can take that and they can spin it – especially during general elections, which is exactly what we needed in Kenya. Earlier

this year, or last year – last year when general election, the politicians did exactly what I'm talking about. Equity. Especially with respect to distribution of land in Kenya. And they spin it and they span it, so so vigorously that towards the end of the year as the elections were coming to an end and the announcements were being made as to who won and who lost we couldn't take it and we went at each other's throat before the whole world. Nobody knew what was happening in Kenya. Fortunately, we were eventually assisted by the international community to bring that crisis to an end. But this is what happens when people do not manage their resources in a responsible way, in an accountable way and when they do not promote equity, so that their people accept that indeed there are efforts to promoting equity. [Video cuts to the next part]

It is extremely important that there is peace in the world and that you can travel. And most travelers are going to look at the marvels of nature; they are going to see, to look at the resources that are in the environment or want to see the creativity that man has created in the course of history. So if you're not going to see a monument in Rome, you probably want to go to Serengeti to see the lions, to see the elephants, to see the cheetahs, to see the migration. So those of us who travel have a special interest in ensuring that these resources are properly managed. And one of the reasons why *[indistinguishable]* this conference is so important and why the concept of ecotourism is so important (and I really want to commend Martha and her colleagues for nurturing this idea of ecotourism for so many years with so much commitment) is that if the resources are not properly managed, we will lose them in many ways almost *[indistinguishable]*. It is because Africa is not industrialized that Africa is so rich in biodiversity. And Dr. Rotich knows the value of that biodiversity and how rich we are in Africa of this biodiversity. But as we try to catch up to development in the world, we are not conscious of the gift that we still have and which is lost to much of the world because of industrial development and that we will lose it too. So it is the concept of such is what you are nurturing in this conference and the value of this conference that we can protect biodiversity. So the Greenbelt Movement also has been a vehicle to educate people on the fact that this biodiversity can disappear if it is not properly managed. And of course you cannot protect what you don't know. So it's very important to understand this biodiversity. And also understand that this biodiversity lives in an ecosystem, and it is for that reason that we have expanded our mission not only to protect individual trees we are planting on our farms but also the forests of our national parks and going beyond to the point where we want to say that here in Africa if we do not protect, especially the Congo forest, which is the second largest forest in the world, if you don't protect it it's not only going to be bad for of the Congo but it's going to be bad for all the people of Africa. [Video cuts to next part]

...in Southeast Asia. Those of us who are concerned about the conservation of this biodiversity and especially those of us who are in tourism, which is one of the greatest industries now. I understand there are more people traveling as tourists now than at any other time in history and going to more destinations than at any other time in history. Now for us, protecting this biodiversity is extremely important but because this biodiversity is in the hands of ordinary folks, it is important to ensure that these ordinary folks benefit from the resources that come because of this biodiversity. And this is where the concept of philanthropy becomes extremely important but you want to make sure that the resources that are

generated reach the ordinary people. Now how do ordinary people say in a region like Africa where they are very poor, how do these resources reach ordinary people? That's the challenge of this conference. Because for many tourists, the main stream tourism business really hopes that some resources will reach the ordinary people who are living with this biodiversity. In this part of the region of Africa, for example, the pastoral communities like the Maasais for example and I'm glad that a good number of them are here at this conference. These are people who live side-by-side with these animals and they're hunters. And for many of them, the culture does not allow them to eat wildlife. The culture encourages them to eat domestic animals but not wildlife, which is part of the reason why wildlife has been saved where they are. Even if you go into many of our national parks, the national parks are not in the areas where you have farming communities; they are in areas where you have pastoral communities. Now how do you improve the life of these people without jeopardizing these biodiversities and to compliment them for taking care of these biodiversities? And how do you protect these biodiversities from the encroaching farming cultures and *[indistinguishable]*, which is pushing these national parks ever so strongly.

Now there are very many challenges that we face. In the Greenbelt Movement, we came up with this idea of Greenbelt Safaris. It was an idea of how can we make sure that the thousands of tourists that come to our region to see this wonderful biodiversity understand also the kind of life ordinary people live. Because in this part of the world, in the mainstream tourism, it's very easy to fly with the latest jet from any destination in Europe or America, land in Nairobi or Mombasa, get into a very beautiful car, go to the lodge, stay in a beautiful lodge, then you will be served by some local people who have been trained, and then you will be taken in beautiful vans into parts and you will see these beautiful animals, and when the time comes you get into that same van brought back, get into your jet and off you go to claim that you know Africa. Well the truth of the matter is you don't know Africa, you know the animals of Africa. But you don't know the human side of Africa, and that human side is what are trying to capture in the Greenbelt Safaris. We want people to come, obviously people who are willing to venture, to come to greenbelt to spend 2 or 3 days with them telling them about what is Africa, what is Kenya, who we are, what we do, what kind of politics do we have, what kind of economy do we have, what kind of challenges, what makes us happy, what makes us sad, so you understand what kind of people we are. And then we take you out into the villages where you live for 2 or 3 days with those women who tried to protect their environment, their immediate environment. And then you walk with them, you plant trees with them, you fetch water with them, you look for firewood with them, you eat with them, you sleep there where they sleep, and you get a glimpse of the kind of life these people live and the struggles that they're trying to overcome, and how despite all that they're trying to protect their environment. And then after those days we take you and we take you to a lodge like this to meet the other half of tourism. And when you get there, when you look at those angles, you see them very differently. When you're going to those parts and you see how sometimes the tourists are very insensitive to the animals. How sometimes they are very insensitive to the parks – they want to ride everywhere in the park. They're very insensitive to the fact that the tracks destroy the environment. You look at it with an eye of an environmentalist. You look at it with an eye of a

conservationist. You look at it with an eye of a person whose looking far beyond your time. You want your grandchildren and many generations later to be able to come to the same place and see those animals and not see them in a museum or see their skeletons, but still see them in that beautiful environment. So you want to conserve and that's what sometimes moves people to want to support that work. And so, so that's why we started the Greenbelt Movement, and we have had wonderful friends. Now we don't plan it as a business, that's a big challenge for us because we have not found people who can learn it as a business for us to generate income for the Greenbelt Movement but also become part and part of the Africans who want to conserve the biodiversity that they enjoy. And in fact before I forget, let me introduce, we have two people here who try to put that campaign for the Greenbelt Movement and we sent two people to come and attend this conference Magdelene Bariki and David Mutinda. Thank you very much.

Now let me tell you that is a very exciting program but it is also very challenging. And these are some of the issues that I'm sure we will be discussing here at the conference because as you try to promote philanthropy as part of tourism, as part of your traveling experiences, you will be challenged, especially in an area like this. Some of our challenges...[Video cuts to next section]

That can be extremely disempowering. So instead of empowering the communities as you try to help them, you disempower them. So it is a delicate balance of empowering and creating sustainability within those communities. Creating capacity – that's one of the things I'm sure Magdelene and Mutinda will tell you and people who are doing ecotourism here in east Africa: how do you raise capacity? When we take these guests to the communities, we do some preparation. We first go and make sure we can get a home where for example there is a bed and we want to make sure the bed has sheets, clean sheets, and we want to make sure that we have a latrine. And you know most people, most of you from outside Africa, you have forgotten how to use latrines. You almost have to be helped by somebody else to be able to use the latrines. And yet that's our way of life. So you don't want a tourist who says, "I need to use the toilet" and you have to be transported 30 kilometers to get a toilet. How do you raise that capacity? How do you make sure that water is clean? Fortunately now we have a lot of bottled water, but when we started we didn't even have bottled water so you have to boil it because you don't want the tourists to be sick. So raising that standard.

And one of the issues we have been challenging the team who run the Greenbelt Movement is to what extent can you go to an area where there has been Greenbelt Safaris and you say it has changed the way of life of these people for the better. Has it transformed them in the way they think? Has it transformed them in the way they look at the environment? Or the way they look at themselves? Has it empowered them? Or has it disempowered them? I remember we had to do silly things like telling people, you know, in our culture sometimes when you say I love – like you go to the Maasais and their beautiful beads and you say "Oh I love those beads." The Maasai is not going to remove those beads and give them to you because you love them but sometimes when you people – people from Europe or America – when you say "Oh I love." Let me put it this way; you say to a Maasai "Oh I love your beads, give them to me" he's going to tell you "Thank you. No no no no. I'm not giving them to you." But if somebody tells you "I love your

earrings, can you give them to me?” you are embarrassed because you almost feel like you have to give them. You don’t have to! Or rather you shouldn’t. But these are actual differences. The culture’s so different that when someone compliments you and tells you so nice give it to me you almost feel like well I guess I better give it. But the truth of the matter is the culture this is the way of complimenting. So sometimes we have to deal with very simple and silly activities of making sure that *[indistinguishable]* that you don’t, when you are complimented, that you don’t feel uncomfortable because you’re complimented. I know when I first went to America one of the things that I noticed was that everytime an American is complimented he says thank you. Well we don’t say it. When anybody says, “I love your dress,” we just keep quiet. I’m sure an American feels like *[indistinguishable]* why don’t you respond, it’s a matter of responding. So culture can sometimes be a challenge. How do you bring these different cultures to a community that is not used to, it’s not sophisticated, and that there is no discomfort. Because the alternative is to be sheltered in a lodge.

How do you make people own that work so that you are partners in development; you are partners. Because after all, the mission is sustainable development that you become partners and as I said that there is not the dependence. And how do people develop a sense of appreciation for what is being given? Their appreciation for the support they are getting. And not to develop a sense of – what do I call it in English – a sense of like like you owe it me to give. Nobody owes anybody anything. You don’t owe me and I don’t owe you. You are being compassionate. You are being human or humane. But I don’t deserve it. You know sometimes you feel, you can feel better when you give and people feel almost like they have a right. Yeah the word I am looking for is entitlement. There is not a sense of entitlement in this *[indistinguishable]*. That there is a sense of appreciation. Recently I traveled to Japan and I heard an important word in Japan called “motiri” and I have been sharing this word throughout the world because I think it was a very beautiful word. I was sharing with them the concept of three R – reduce, reuse, recycle. And then I learnt that in Japan they traditionally have a concept which is based in Buddhism that is called motiri. I guess when Japan was not so rich – which is not too long ago – they were very conscious about the way they used their resources so this word motiri means; as I talked about reduce, reuse, recycle then they said motiri. Motiri translates and it was a complex, it was a deep concept as many religious concepts are and it can mean many things. But even a monk told me what it really means is you have to learn, even as a child, you have to learn to be respectful of the resources that you have. Respectful. You have to be grateful. So respect, gratitude, and do not waste. So they told me that it is usually taught to children when they are eating, and as you know they eat a lot of rice, so if you leave as much as one grain of rice on your plate, the parents will say “Oh, what a motiri. Finish it! Do not waste.” So I think that for those of us who are environmentalists and who are worried about the misuse of our resources, I thought that was a very beautiful concept. Reuse. I’m sure in this conference there is a lot you can share about reusing. Reduce. Most people, the *Wall Street Journal*, the Wall Street folks one thing I’m quite sure they did not learn was reduce. Reduce. If you’re going to come to Washington, D.C. in a private jet and you’re asking the government to give you several billion dollars, are you really reducing? Hardly. Recycle. In Kenya we have a campaign where we try to

encourage people to recycle plastic, to recycle plastic. So, reuse, reduce, recycle. And do not waste. Be respectful. Be grateful.

So I know it is not easy. I only have a few minutes according to my time keeper. And so I want to be sure to say when you look at the challenges and the fact that you're working with poor people and you're trying to reduce poverty because you know poverty is a major cause for environmental degradation. And then you have you as a traveler and you're traveling the world and you have some resources and you want these resources to reach those people at the bottom so they can stop destroying the environment so that generations from now will enjoy the same beautiful resources that we have in our environment. It reminds me of a paper I wrote sometime ago, almost 10 years ago. It's amazing how relevant that concept continues to be for me because I wrote this concept, I wrote this speech and I said the bottom. The bottom that we are trying to lift. If you have worked with poor people, the bottom is heavy. The bottom can be very heavy. They make themselves very heavy and sometimes I tell them to lighten yourself a little bit, make yourself lighter, so people, your friends can lift you. But if you make yourselves too heavy, people get tired so as we try to promote traveling, promote tourism, promote development, sustainable development, promote peace as we travel because tourism can also be a great vehicle for peace promotion, we need to remember the bottom is heavy but if we don't do something about the bottom, the environment we so much love will gradually be destroyed by them as they try to sustain their lives. And the recent expediency with the top also shows us that if you don't control the nature of resource management, even at the top, the greed, the selfishness, the desire to accumulate at the expense of others can also bring a collapse from the top. So the bottom is heavy, but we have recently seen that the top can also be very heavy because it's us who are cutting the top. So cutting the top and trying to reach toward the bottom is difficult. And that of course, is the challenge we face and that is why trying to do our best to see what we can do to enjoy these resources, to encourage people to travel and enjoy these resources, but also ensure that they will be here for many generations to come. Thank you all very much.