

Sustained Development, Democracy, and Peace in Africa

When the Norwegian Nobel Committee honored me with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, it intended to send a new and historic message to the world: to rethink peace and security. It wanted to challenge the world to discover the close linkage between good governance, sustainable management of resources, and peace. In managing our resources, we need to realize that they are limited and need to be managed more sustainably, responsibly, and accountably.

Sustainable management of the resources is only possible if we practice good governance, which calls for respect for the rule of law, respect for human rights, a willingness to give space and a voice to the weak and the more vulnerable in our societies; that we respect the voice of the minority, even while accepting the decision of the majority, and respect diversity. Good governance seeks justice and equity for all irrespective of race, religion, gender, and any other parameters, which man uses to discriminate and exclude. Good governance is indeed inclusive and seeks participatory democracy.

We call for the strengthening of institutions, such as the United Nations and its many organs, to restrain strong nations so that they do not walk all over the weak ones. Security of nations at the global level is as important as security of individuals within the national boundaries. And for individuals, as well for the nations, if they are not secure, no one is secure. This is true whether the threat comes from nuclear power or an AK-47.

When we manage our resources sustainably and practice good governance we deliberately and consciously promote cultures of peace, which include the willingness to dialogue and make genuine efforts for healing and reconciliation, especially where there has been misunderstanding, loss of trust, and even conflict. Whenever we fail to nurture these three themes, conflict becomes inevitable.

I come from a continent that has known many conflicts for a long time. Many of them are glaringly due to bad governance, unwillingness to share resources more equitably, selfishness, and a failure to promote cultures of peace.

WANGARI
MAATHAI



Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya, in 1940, the daughter of farmers. The first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctoral degree, in 1977 she founded the Green Belt Movement, a broad-based, grassroots organization which has helped women's groups plant more than 30 million trees to conserve the environment and improve quality of life.

Maathai is internationally recognized for her persistent struggle for democracy, human rights, and environmental conservation. She and the Green Belt Movement have received numerous awards, most notably the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, as well

as the Legion d'Honneur, the Disney Conservation Fund Award, and the Goldman Environmental Prize. She has been named a member of UN Environment Programme's Global 500 Hall of Fame, *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, and *Forbes* magazine's 100 most powerful women in the world.

In 2005 Wangari Maathai was elected presiding officer of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She has also been appointed goodwill ambassador for the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem. (Photo: © Martin Rowe)

Leaders fail to care enough for the ordinary citizens and preoccupy themselves with matters that concern them and let their people down.

We continue to have problems in the Darfur region of Sudan, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, and many other corners of the African continent. All of the conflicts can be traced to failure in governance and responsible and accountable management of resources, and the failure to cultivate cultures of peace, especially engaging in dialogue and reconciliation.

Indeed all over the world, this is often the root cause of conflicts. Inequities, both national and international, are largely responsible for poverty and all its manifestations. There is hardly any conflict in the world that is an exception. Below the thin layer of racial and ethnic chauvinism, religion, and politics, the real reason for many conflicts is the struggle for the access to and control of the limited resources on our planet.

A good number of African leaders have recognized the need for good governance in Africa. This is because, despite all the resources in Africa, development continues to lag behind due to lack of peace and sustainable management of resources. Corruption and mismanagement of resources frustrate development and exacerbate poverty. At the African Union leaders are encouraging each other to deliberately and consciously promote good governance and peace and give development a chance. Challenges are many and varied, but what is encouraging is the commitment demonstrated by leaders, now willing to shun conflict and violence through peaceful resolutions. More of them are willing to face the fact that no development will take place in a state of conflict and mismanagement of state affairs.

As part of this drive in Africa, I have been invited by the Heads of States in the Central African sub-region to be a goodwill ambassador for the Congo Forest Ecosystem. This is not only important to Africa but to the whole

world, especially with respect to climate change. The forest is the second largest: only second to the Amazon forest. Both forests, and indeed other forests of the world, are very important, as they serve as major carbon sinks.

I have also been requested by the African Union to preside over the mobilization of the African Civil Society in order to form a forum, which will advise the Union on how to manage African affairs more justly and responsibly. We all know that weak civil societies are unable to hold their leaders responsible and accountable. Therefore, strengthening civil society would also strengthen the democratization process. A strong civil society can also be an important vehicle for delivery of services like health.

One of the difficult issues we face in sustainable development is consumerism, especially in the rich industrialized countries. In this case, technological advancement can assist with the campaign to reduce, reuse, and recycle resources (the 3Rs). Recently while visiting Japan, I learned of the wonderful concept of *mottainai*, which not only calls for the practicing of the 3Rs, but also teaches us to be grateful, to not waste, and to be appreciative. This old Buddhist teaching is in complete agreement with the concept of sustainability.

In the area of energy, use of hybrid cars contributes to the reduction of the consumption of fossil fuels. Countries that generate much waste must assume responsibility and take action against threats like climate change. The Green Belt Movement is partnering with some organizations by planting trees in our region to offset some carbon and contribute toward the reduction of greenhouse gases—for trees are symbols of peace and hope.

May peace prevail.

Note: This article is adapted from a speech at the Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, Gwanju, South Korea, June 16, 2006.



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