**INSPIRATIONBASE**

*A collection of ethical leadership speeches*

**Wangarĩ Maathai**



Wangari Maathai (born April 1, 1940, Nyeri, Kenya—died September 25, 2011, Nairobi), Kenyan politician and environmental activist who was awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize for Peace, becoming the first black African woman to win a Nobel Prize. Her work was often considered both unwelcome and subversive in her own country, where her outspokenness constituted stepping far outside traditional gender roles. Source: Britannica ([link](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wangari-Maathai))

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| **WM 1*. Keynote address during the 2nd World Congress of Agroforestry*** | | | |  |
| One of my fond memories is of visiting the World Agroforestry Centre and planting a seedling that was presented to me in a biodegradable casing. I immediately wanted to replace the plastic containers distributed by the Green Belt Movement for its tree planting campaign with such biodegradable casings. This would make a big contribution in reducing flimsy plastic bags that are also used to package goods. They end up as waste that we later see on trees and hedges, in rivers and soils, at dumpsites and even in the stomachs of domestic animals. The Green Belt Movement urges the government to increase the gauge of flimsy plastic bags so that the industries produce bags with a thicker gauge that make it possible to re-use, recycle and reduce. This is the 3R campaign. Without laws to demand the thicker bags from the industry, millions of flimsy plastic bags continue to be thrown into the environment. We have been impressed by the government of Rwanda, which perhaps taking a cue from the 3R campaign, embraced a no-flimsy plastic policy in Rwanda. It has already made the country cleaner and safer from diseases like malaria associated with filthy waste and stagnant water. In respect of the 3R campaign, allow me to introduce to you a Japanese concept known as Mottainai, which embraces not only the 3Rs, but also urges respect, gratitude and utilisation of resources without wasting or over-consuming. The Mottainai concept is embedded in Japanese tradition and faith based practises. Japanese children learn to be respectful, grateful and accountable to future generations even as they grow up. Such intergenerational responsibility is important and should guide our political and socio-economic decisions….  On Food Security and Livelihoods, I remember growing up in the Central highlands of Kenya at a time when complete lack of food was rare. This was partly because the community had diversity of foods some of which, like cassava, sweet potatoes, arrowroots and perennial food crops like bananas and sugar cane served to cushion communities during droughts and crop failures. There were also wild fruit trees to supply tasty and nutritious fruits, wild vegetables, honey and roots. There were two monsoon rain seasons that gave the land adequate water to grow enough to eat and store in granaries, which were part of the infrastructure of every household. Today a significant sign of food insecurity is the disappearance of granaries and diversity of food crops at household level. Farmers have been encouraged to plant cash crops like tea, coffee and sugar cane on every piece of their available land, leaving no space for tree farming and growing of food crops. Even when available such land is allowed to lose top soil and water through soil erosion, becoming degraded and unable to support food crops. Therefore, when rains fail and drought strike, such as is happening in Kenya, there is not only an ecological, but also a human disaster. Agroforestry science and practices should respond to such challenges and reduce the suffering.  I mentioned Mottainai in Japan above, but in many of the world traditions people developed mechanisms that allow them to reduce their vulnerability. For example, amongst the Kikuyu community here in Kenya, hungry vulnerable groups and travellers were permitted to feed off the farms as long as they did not carry any of the food away. One was required to sit down and eat and satisfy hunger, but not carry food away. It was a common law that people obeyed to prevent death from hunger. For these groups there was a special granary of God (ikumbi ria Ngai), which was supplied by the public. As members passed by from the field with a harvest (magetha), they would throw some of it into the granary of God. This was a good sign of community sense of responsibility to others and very much an equivalent of the biblical tithes or 10%. Such common laws and coded wisdom, on local biodiversity and other agricultural issues, is largely being replaced by greed, selfishness and complete lack of sense of community good. We are more likely to be our brothers’ killers, rather than our brothers’ keepers! | | | | |
| **Date** | August 24th 2009 | **Source** | Green Belt Movement Website ([link](http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles)) | |

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| **WM 2*. Sustained Development, Democracy, and Peace in Africa. Gwangju, South Korea*** | | | |  |
| 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. Leaders fail to care enough for the ordinary citizens and pre-occupy themselves with matters that concern them and let their people down.  As I speak we continue to have problems in the Darfur region of Sudan, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, and many other corners of the African continent. All of the conflicts can be traced to failure in governance, 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 and control of the limited resources on our planet.  One of the difficult issues we face in sustainable development is consumerism, especially in the rich industrialised 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. Indeed, I was very impressed to learn that by using technology many new items were being made from recycled materials like plastic waste, from which companies could make beautiful furoshiki.  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 organisations by planting trees in our region to offset some carbon and contribute towards the reduction of the greenhouse gases.  As we planted a tree today at the memorial grounds for the victims of the May 18 Democratic Uprising in 1980, I was very aware of the importance of that symbolism. For trees are symbols of peace and hope. We know that the people of the Korean peninsular have hope. May Peace Prevail. | | | | |
| **Date** | June 16, 2006 | **Source** | Green Belt Movement Website ([link](http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles)) | |

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| **WM 3*. Rise Up and Walk! The Third Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*** | | | |  |
| During the last thirty years of working with the Green Belt Movement I saw the need to give our people values. The man whose birthday we celebrate today exemplifies these values. For example, the value of service for the common good. How shall we motivate our men and women in the region, willing to sacrifice and volunteer so that others may have it better? The values of commitment, persistence and patience, to stay with it until the goal is realised.  The love for the land and desire to protect it from desertification and other destructive processes. Perhaps it is due to lack of information and ignorance, or perhaps it is due to poverty, but we need people who love Africa so much that they want to protect her from destructive processes. Some that are threatening the entire continent include desertification due to deforestation, encroachment into forests for subsistence farming, overgrazing and loss of biodiversity and soil. Of particular importance for Africa and the world is the protection of the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem.  These two values are important for African leaders, who should govern and serve for the benefit of the people, rather than themselves. Working at the grassroots level and with the poor people, it was depressing to see those in power fail to provide necessary services and protect the land. Instead they facilitated the exploitation of the people and their resources. Because I have experienced irresponsible governance in the course of my work for the environment, it is difficult to dismiss the reservations and concerns expressed by the G8 leaders.  Another value we must espouse is the love and concern for the youth. One of the most devastating experiences at the grassroots level today is to see the youth wasting away because they are unemployed, even after they have completed secondary and tertiary education. Governments should prioritise the youth and their health. | | | | |
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