



AT THE LORRAINE MOTEL

DR. WANGARI MAATHAI biographical profile

2010 INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM AWARD

The Hyde Family Foundations, sponsor

She once said - quote, *"I kept stumbling and falling and stumbling and falling as I searched for the good. 'Why?' I asked myself.*

Now I believe that I was on the right path all along, but then others told me that I shouldn't have a career, that I shouldn't raise my voice, that women are supposed to have a master. That I needed to be someone else. Finally I was able to see that if I had a contribution I wanted to make, I must do it, despite what others said. That I was OK the way I was. That it was all right to be strong."

And she was strong.

Dr. Wangari Maathi (*Wan - garri, --- Ma- thigh*) was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree. She and the Green Belt Movement have received numerous awards, most notably the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the first African woman to receive the prize.

She received her doctorate degree and masters' degree in America, and later pursued doctoral studies in Germany and the University of Nairobi, obtaining a Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi.

She became chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and an associate professor in 1976 and 1977 respectively. In both cases, she was the first woman to attain those positions in the region.

Active in the National Council of Women of Kenya and former chairman from 1981-87, she introduced the idea of community-based tree planting.

She continued to develop this idea into a broad-based grassroots organization whose main focus is poverty reduction and environmental conservation through tree planting. The organization became known as the **Green Belt Movement**, and has assisted women in planting more than 40 million trees on community lands including farms, schools and church compounds.

Through her work at various volunteer associations, she saw that most of Kenya's problems was environmental degradation.

The Green Belt Movement carried out pro-democracy activities such as registering voters for the election and pressing for constitutional reform and freedom of expression. Her name became universal and her mission of freedom and democracy gained worldwide support.

In the early 1990's, it came to the attention of Dr. Maathai and other pro-democracy activists that a list of individuals were targeted for assassination and that a government-sponsored coup was possible. She was arrested and charged with spreading malicious rumors, sedition, and treason.

A wide variety of international organizations and eight senators (including Al Gore and Edward M. Kennedy) put pressure on Kenya to substantiate the charges against the pro-democracy activists or risk damaging relations with the United States. In November 1992, the government of Kenya dropped the charges.

Dr. Maathai campaigned for parliament in the 2002 elections and defeated the ruling party Kenya African National Union, and won with an overwhelming 98% of the vote.

In all she has been recognized and received over 23 national and international awards, including;

2005-- Time Magazine as one of 100 most influential people in the world, and by Forbes Magazine as one of 100 most powerful women in the world

2006-- World Citizenship Award

2006-- The Disney Conservation Fund Award

2007-- Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights

2009-- NAACP Image Award - Chairman's Award