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[00:00:00] I call upon Vangari Muta Matai to give her Nobel lecture.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Honourable Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I stand before you and the world humbled by this recognition [00:01:00] and uplifted by the honour of being the 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate. As the first African woman to receive this prize, I accept it on behalf of the people of Kenya and Africa, and indeed, the whole world.

Tree planting became a natural choice to address some of the initial basic needs identified by women. Also, tree planting is simple, Attainable and guarantees quick successful results within a reasonable amount of time. These are all important to sustain interest and commitment. So together we planted over 30 million trees that provide fuel, food, shelter, and income to support the children's and education and household needs.

The activity also creates employment and improves [00:02:00] soils and watersheds. Through their involvement, women gain some degree of power over their lives, especially their social and economic position and relevance in the family. This work continues. Initially, the work was difficult because historically our people have been persuaded to believe that because they are poor, they lack not only capital, but also knowledge and skills to address their challenges.

Instead, they are conditioned to believe that their solutions to their problems must come from outside. Although initially the Green Belt Movement tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace per se, it soon became clear that addressing That governance of the environment was, was impossible without a democratic space.

Therefore, the tree [00:03:00] eventually became a symbol for the democratic struggle. Citizens were mobilized to challenge widespread abuses of power, corruption, and environmental mismanagement. In Nairobi's Uhuru Park, at Freedom Corner, and in many parts of the country. Trees of peace were planted to demand the release of prisoners of conscience and a peaceful transition to democracy.

Through the Green Belt Movement, thousands of ordinary citizens were mobilized and empowered to take action and effect change. They learned to overcome fear and a sense of hopelessness and moved to defend democratic rights. In time, the tree also became a symbol of peace and conflict resolution, especially during the ethnic clashes when the Green Belt Movement used peace [00:04:00] trees to reconcile disputing communities.

During the ongoing rewriting of the Constitution, similar trees of peace have been planted in many parts of the country to promote a culture of peace. Using trees as a symbol of peace is in keeping with a widespread African tradition. For example, in my own community, a man, the elders carried a staff from a tree called thege.

Whenever there were disputing sides, that staff was placed between them. And as soon as the elders placed that thege or that staff between them, They stepped back, stopped fighting, and went to seek the conciliation. Many African communities have this heritage and tradition. Such practices are part of an extensive [00:05:00] cultural heritage in Africa, which contributes both to the conservation of habitats and to cultures of peace.

With the destruction of these cultures and the introduction of new values, Local biodiversity is no longer valued and protected, and as a result, it quickly degenerates and disappears. For this reason, the Green Belt Movement explores the concept of cultural biodiversity, especially with respect to indigenous trees and medicinal plants.

As we progressively understood the causes of environmental degradation, we saw the need for good governance. Indeed, the state of any country's environment is a reflection of the kind of governance in place. And without good governance, there can be no peace. Many countries which have poor governance systems are also [00:06:00] likely to have conflicts and poor laws protecting the environment.

In the year 2002, the courage, resilience, patience and commitment of members of the Green Belt Movement, other civil society organizations, and the Kenyan public culminated in the peaceful transition to a democracy government and laid the foundation for a more stable society. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is 30 years since we started this work.

Activities that devastate the environment and societies. continue unabated. Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking so that humanity stops threatening its life support system. We are called to [00:07:00] assist the earth to heal her woods and in the process heal our own. Indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty, and wonder.

This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process. As I conclude, I reflect on my own childhood experience when I would visit a stream next to our home to fetch water for my mother. I would drink water straight from the stream because it was clean.

Playing among the arrow roots, I tried in vain to pick up the strands of frog's eggs, believing they were [00:08:00] beads with which I could adorn myself. But every time I put my little fingers under them, under these beads, they would break. Later, I saw thousands of tadpoles, black, energetic, and wiggling through the clear water against the background of the brown earth.

This is the word I inherited from my mother. Today, 50 years later. My stream has dried up. Women walk longer distances to fetch water, which is not always clean. And children may never play with the tadpoles and the frog eggs, and they may never know what they lost. The challenge, as I stand here today, is to restore this home for the tadpoles and give [00:09:00] back to the children.

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