

**STATEMENT**  
**by**  
**Prof. Wangari Maathai,**  
**Nobel Peace Laureate,**  
**Goodwill Ambassador for the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem,**  
**&**  
**UN Messenger of Peace**

**At the Opening of the High Level Segment of the United Nations  
Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - COP  
15**

**Copenhagen, Denmark, 15 December 2009**

**Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Governments,  
H.E. The Prime Minister of Denmark, Mr. Rasmussen,  
His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales,  
The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon,  
The President of CoP-15, Madam Connie Hedegaard,**

**The Executive Secretary of the Convention, Mr Yvo de Boer,  
Honorable delegates,**

Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to the people and the Government of Denmark for the warm hospitality that has been placed at our disposal. In the past, the Green belt Movement has worked closely with Denmark and we have enjoyed a warm

relationship and partnership working not only for the climate change but also for the environment and sustainable development in general.

Throughout the world, people's expectation is that in Copenhagen delegates understand that while they cannot negotiate with the climate, they have to negotiate with each other. The delegates understand the science and the predictions over for example, the vulnerability of regions like Africa and the Small Island States, who are suffering from the negative impact of climate change even as delegates wrangle with Kyoto protocol and associated issues.

The litany of woes have been repeated enough times in conferences and meetings leading to Copenhagen throughout the world. They include melting polar ice, permafrost and glaciers, deforestation, erratic and failed rains, prolonged drought, drying up rivers and lakes, parched landscapers, dying animals, and large populations faced with diseases associated with malnutrition. It is not necessary to recite these threats again here because you have all heard them before.

We have also heard before how there should be a historic responsibility for the emissions of greenhouse gases from regions with high-energy consumption levels, how such regions have overused the common resources and atmospheric space. It is this understanding that has given rise to expectations for a historic carbon responsibility and carbon justice.

We are generally agreed that emissions should be cut but are still arguing over how far the rich industrialized countries are willing to move away from their familiar comfort zone and cut emissions to levels that will save lives of the most vulnerable, as we have been informed by scientific data from Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The rich countries have the technology and the capital to adapt and mitigate, and thereby deal with many of the threats that will face the developing world. If the developed countries

do not feel sufficiently at risk, they may be unwilling to embrace an ambitious and legally binding Kyoto Protocol-like agreement.

Therefore, it is up to the developing world to convince them that the threat is real and it will face them too, despite their perceived invulnerability. Climate change is an issue of security both locally and internationally. We are in it together.

Allow me to say that we may not come out of here with a perfect document. I have been attending UN meetings since 1976, when I attended the Habitat conference in Vancouver, Canada. Delegates there too argued and wrangled over language and money. No delegate leaves the conference with a perfect document and a perfect financial mechanism to implement their dreams; and the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change might not be any different. What we must find is a common ground for partnership that is based on a willingness to be fair, trusting, honest, transparent and responsible, to ourselves and to millions who are following these discussions from home. Indeed to generations yet to be born.

It would be essential to leave Copenhagen with a binding timetable and compliance measures in place; with a document that respects science, history and justice. Many of our leaders are here and continue to arrive. I have much confidence that we shall see leadership demonstrated with respect to Kyoto Protocol, adaptation, finance, REDD+, capacity building and technology. Their high number is a reflection of their commitment to the expectations of the people of the world, and especially the most vulnerable. They will act.

### **Excellencies, Honourable delegates,**

To achieve the goals, we need to overcome a legacy of mistrust that is born of a past era. There are several words that have been reverberating throughout the conference. They include words like

transparency, honesty, accountability, fairness, rights and responsibilities. Others I heard at events organized by religious leaders. They included words that express values like compassion, empathy and *mottainai* (encompassing respect, gratitude and not wasting). These values, more than science and figures, might be the basis for a true human partnership among our leaders to achieve the ultimate objectives of the Convention.

At this point I want to take a moment to thank groups and individuals who have already demonstrated much commitment. They include the heads of States of the Central African region, who appointed me the Good will ambassador of the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem. Also, the British and the Norwegian Governments through their respective Prime Ministers, the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown and the Rt. Hon. Jens Stoltenberg. Each of these government made available US\$ 100m with which we established the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF) as a global response to the climate crisis. The Rt Hon. Paul Martin, former Prime Minister of Canada and I were asked to co-chair the Fund which is hosted by the African Development Bank (AfDB), under the able leadership of Mr. Donald Kaberuka. After Copenhagen we hope that more partners will come forward to support this Fund. Such partnership has already been established between the Fund and the Prince Albert II Foundation. With such commitment I am hoping that forests will be an integral part of the solutions in the Copenhagen agreement. In committing to REDD+, we support restoration, conservation and protection not only of the forest ecosystems for the role they play as carbon sinks, but also for all the other essential services they give to all forms of life. Forests can live without us, but we cannot without them.

From Copenhagen we need a governance structure based on accountability between donors and beneficiaries under a consolidated UN financial mechanism that will make resources easily accessible to those who need them most. For Africa and other regions often

considered lacking in capacity, it is important to allow established institutions such as the African Development Bank, to play an effective role.

Distinguished delegates,

The Orb you see here contains stories, voices, images and actions collected from around the world to create a global mandate for action now. It is the symbol of the collective spirit which brings together the efforts of all major climate campaigns this year.

The Orb will also have space reserved on its hard drive for one final but significant document on how nations will deal with climate change.

Here at Copenhagen, we have a unique chance to challenge ourselves and give the world more than hope. That is, as we have been saying all along: an **ambitious, fair and legally-binding agreement**.

Before I conclude, allow me to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who has designated me as a UN Messenger of Peace with a focus on Environment and Climate Change.

“May Peace and Climate Justice prevail!”

Thank you.

