

Environment is the major world issue

Posted by

Friday, 08 October 2004 03:30 - Last Updated Friday, 08 October 2004 03:30

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With the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Kenya's Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources Professor Wangari Maathai, this *Agence France-Presse*, reviews the last few decades of the politics of Environment. Also included here is the

allafrica.com

piece o-n the announcement. -- Space & Technology Editor

Africa: Kenyan Minister Becomes Continent's First Woman Nobel Prize Winner

Catholic Information Service for Africa (Nairobi)

NEWS

October 8, 2004

Posted to the web October 8, 2004

Nairobi

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200410080541.html>

Kenya's Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources Professor Wangari Maathai is the winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, "for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace".

Prof Maathai, 64, was picked from a record field of 194 candidates, among them US President George W Bush, British Premier Tony Blair and Pope John Paul II. The results were announced o-n Friday, October 8, 2004.

Prof Maathai, an environmental campaigner and founder of the Green Belt Movement, is the first African woman to be awarded the prestigious prize since it was first handed out in 1901. The prize will be officially presented in Oslo, Norway o-n December 10, 2004.

As the first African woman Nobel laureate, Prof Maathai becomes the 12th female worldwide to win the coveted Prize. The 2003 prize also went to a woman, Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi.

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The Green Belt Movement, which Maathai founded in 1977, is a Kenya-based Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Comprised mainly of women, the Movement has so far planted between 25-30 million trees across Africa.

Born in 1940, in Nyeri, Central Kenya, Prof Maathai was the first East and Central African Woman to earn a PhD, from the University of Nairobi in 1971, before proceeding to become the first Female Chair of Department of Veterinary Anatomy at the same University in 1976.

Prof Wangari Maathai ran for Presidency of Kenya in 1977 but lost to the then incumbent Daniel arap Moi. She was elected Member of Parliament (MP) in 2002.

She has authored two books; *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience* and *The Canopy of Hope: My Life Campaigning for Africa, Women, and the Environment*.

The Nobel Prize is named after Swedish philanthropist, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite.

Prof Wangari Maathai has had many firsts in African.

Earlier in 2004, she was awarded the Sophie Prize -one of the world's most generous environment and development prizes- for being "the most outspoken and respected environmental activist in Africa. . . She has pioneered a unique holistic community based approach to development, combining environmental education and empowerment of civil society, especially women. Her brave defiance to undemocratic and oppressive political leadership has encouraged others in her country and region to stand up for their rights and that of the environment. She is an inspiration to all those who fight for global justice."

Prof Maathai also bagged the international Petra Kelly Prize 2004, awarded by the Heinrich B?ll Foundation.

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On May 24, 2004, Hon Maathai received highest honors from Yale University when she was conferred the Honorary Doctorate degree of Humane Letters in New Haven, Connecticut during the university's graduation ceremony.

On May 10, 2004, she was also honored by the Center for Environment, Research and Conservation (CERC) at Columbia University, and received the Conservation Scientist award at a ceremony in New York City for her continued commitment to environmental conservation.

The Green Belt Movement was awarded the Environment Excellence Award during the annual conference for The World Association of NGOs (WANGO) held in Bangkok, Thailand, September 25-28, 2003.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev Dr Samuel Kobia has sent Warm congratulations to Prof Maathai on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2004.

Speaking as "your compatriot", Kobia, a Kenyan national, assures Prof Maathai that she has "brought honour to the African continent and its people".

Recalling that she was the WCC's advisor on environmental issues and a keynote speaker at its ground-breaking conference on Faith and Science in 1979, Kobia affirms that the Council has "gained much from your insights".

"Your campaign against deforestation across Africa is a unique contribution not only to save African forests, but also African lives.

As the Nobel Committee correctly says, you represent an 'example and a source of inspiration for everyone in Africa fighting for sustainable development, democracy and peace'," Kobia said.

CISA congratulates Professor Wangari Maathai on this auspicious occasion, which is a great honor not just to the African woman, but to all Africans and to the campaigners for justice,

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peace, and the integrity of creation.

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