

The President, Addis Ababa University,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate the organizers of this event and in particular the African Union Commission, Addis Ababa University and UNEP Liaison Office to the African Union. It is gratifying to see many of you especially the youth, who despite the long weekend, have deemed it important to participate in this commemoration of the first Wangari Maathai Day.

Professor Wangari Maathai was a compatriot although that is not the reason for our participation in today's event. It is because of what she achieved and the difference she made in the lives of millions of people around the world that Kenya saw it fit to propose to the Assembly of Heads of State of Africa to honour and memorialize this gallant African woman for her immeasurable contribution in the fields of preservation of the environment and sustainable development and women empowerment as well as the unwavering dedication to promote peace, democracy and human rights in Africa.

We are very pleased that the Assembly of Heads of State concurred with our proposal to pay tribute to Professor Wangari Maathai and decided to designate 3rd March as Wangari Maathai Day to be observed in conjunction with Africa Environment Day. The decision urges African countries to actively observe this day. Today's event is therefore an actualization of the decision and it is our hope that events related to this day will take place across the continent as a tribute to Prof. Wangari Maathai life's work.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Professor Wangari Mathai received numerous national, continental and global awards and accolades. Perhaps the highpoint of her achievements was the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her role in making the world to understand the link between environmental management and peace and security.

But Professor Maathai journey to prominence was not an easy one nor was it for the faint hearted. As a consequence of her advocacy activities, Professor Maathai was repeatedly harassed, jailed and publicly vilified. However her passion and focus for the course she believed in and her courage and tenacity made her a household name and the most respected woman in Kenya. Internationally, she was acknowledged for her principled and steadfast stand for the rights of people and the environment.

Professor Maathai was an ardent advocate of youth empowerment. She visualized an institution where young African leaders in the field of conservation and environmental studies could be nurtured and developed. The Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies is today a reality. The Institute encourages, among other things, research on environmental governance and its linkages with peace, human rights and democracy in Africa. Its primary focus is on changing the values, ethics and attitudes of change agents, ultimately transforming them into better stewards of resources and agents of peace.

The decision of the Assembly of Heads of State also envisages the creation of a "Wangari Maathai Prize for Outstanding African Achievements in Environment and Biodiversity Conservation". Work on the modalities of establishing the award is underway. When it is launched, the award will serve as a tribute to the life and work of Wangari Maathai, while celebrating the efforts of Africans to address the continent's most pressing development issues. It will also encourage grassroots activism and innovation in the fields of environment, women's rights and democracy.

As we celebrate this day let us strive to emulate Professor Wangari Maathai's resilience and determination in her quest to fight poverty , environmental destruction, disempowerment, bad governance, and a loss of the values. Professor Wangari Maathai wanted to make a difference and she succeeded in doing so beyond expectations. She was also the epitome of the strength of a woman.

I thank you.