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**ESTABLISHMENT OF PROF. WANGARI MAATHAI PRIZE AND
SUPPORT FOR PROF. MAATHAI PEACE INSTITUTE
(Item Proposed by the Republic of Kenya)**

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PROF. MAATHAI PEACE INSTITUTE**

AGENDA ITEM

(Item Proposed by the Republic of Kenya)

Introduction

1. Environment, biodiversity and natural resources are areas that Africa as a continent enjoys comparative advantage over other geographical regions. Africa is endowed with a wealth of mineral and natural resources but it is the most negatively affected by the improper extraction of these resources. This has often led to political instability, violence and corruption and therefore it is important to address these issues as well as motivate those who selflessly devote themselves to environmental management through grassroots efforts. In this regard, the “Wangari Maathai Prize for Outstanding African Achievements in Environment and Sustainable Development” 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 and encouraging grassroots activism and innovation.

A Synopsis of Prof. Wangari Maathai’ s Legacy

2. Prof. Wangari Muta Maathai was phenomenal African woman having been the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree. Professor Maathai realized that behind poverty and environmental destruction were deeper issues of disempowerment, bad governance, and a loss of the values that had enable communities to sustain their land and livelihoods, and what was best in their cultures in this regard planting of trees became an entry-point for a larger social, economic, and environmental agenda.

3. She established Green Belt Movement in 1977, involving working with women to improve livelihoods by increasing their access to resources like firewood for cooking a clean water. She became a great advocate for better management of natural resources and for sustainability, equity, and justice.

4. As a Member of Parliament, she emphasized: reforestation, forest protection, and the restoration of degraded land; education initiatives, including scholarships for those orphaned by HIV/AIDS; and expanded access to voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) as well as improved nutrition for those living with HIV/AIDS. Professor Maathai served as a mediator and a critical voice for peace, accountability, and justice. In addition, she and GBM were instrumental in ensuring that the Kenya constitution, ratified by a public vote in 2010, included the right of all citizens to a clean and healthy environment, and that the drafting of the constitution was truly consultative.

5. In 2004, Professor Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her work for sustainable development, democracy, and peace – the first African woman

and the first environmentalist to receive this honour. In announcing the award, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said that Professor Maathai “stands at the front of the fight to promote ecologically viable social, economic and cultural development in Kenya and in Africa.” It praised the “holistic approach” of her work and called her a “strong voice speaking for the best forces in Africa to promote peace and good living conditions on that continent.”

6. In 2006 Professor Maathai co-founded the Nobel Women's Initiative with five of her fellow women peace laureates to advocate for justice, equality, and peace worldwide. In recent years Professor Maathai played an increasingly important role in global efforts to address climate change, specifically through advocating for the protection of indigenous forest and the inclusion of civil society in policy divisions.

In 2005 ten Central African governments appointed her the goodwill ambassador for the Congo Basin rainforest and that same year she accepted the position of presiding officer of the African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).

7. In 2006, Professor Maathai joined with the United Nations environment Programme (UNEP) to launch a campaign to plant a billion trees around the world. That goal was met in less than a year; the target now stand at 14 billion. In 2007, Professor Maathai became co-chair (with former Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin) of the Congo Basin Forest Fund, an initiative of the British and Norwegian Governments, and in 2009 she was designated a United Nations messenger of peace by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

8. In 2010, Professor Maathai became a trustee of the Karura Forest Environmental Education Trust. That same year, in partnership with the University of Nairobi, she established the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies (WMI). The WMI will bring together academic research in land use, forestry, agriculture, resource-based conflicts, and peace studies taking the Green Belt Movement approach and members of the organization. Through sharing their experiences, academics and those working at the grassroots will learn from and educate each other about the linkages between livelihoods and ecosystems.

9. Professor Maathai received a number honours. Those bestowed on her by governments include: the Order of the Rising Sun (Japan, 2009), the Legion D'Honneur (France, 2006) and Elder of the Golden Heart and Elder of the Burning Spear (Kenya, 2004, 2003). Professor Maathai also received awards from many organizations and institutions throughout the world, including: the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights (2007), the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Lifetime Achievement Award (2006), the Sophie Price (2004), the Goldman Prize (1991), the Right Livelihood Award (1984); and honorary doctorates from Yale University and Morehouse College in the U.S., Ochanomizu University in Japan, and the University of Norway, among others.

10. The following activities have been suggested to form the basis of honouring Prof. Wangari Maathai:

- Renaming AU tree planting day to Prof. Wangari Maathai day;
- Planting a tree in her honouring in the AU garden;
- Creating a Prof. Wangari Maathai Environmental Award;
- Encourage AU Members states to name Parks and streets in her honour;
- Partnering Pan African University with Prof. Wangari Maathai Institute of Peace and Environment.

Objectives of the Award

11. To date, Africa does not have a prize for individuals and organizations that have significantly contributed to environment and sustainable development. At a time when biodiversity loss, human rights and peace and security are becoming ever more relevant in the context of sustainable development, climate change and poverty alleviation, African governments should recognize and reward those who are making or have made substantial efforts to adapt to and mitigate these problems on the continent.

Participation

12. The creation of Prof. Wangari Maathai Cash Award will involve all the Member States of the African Union. Creating an award has financial implication hence requires sustainable management on the same. Partnership between Prof. Wangari Maathai Institute of Peace and Environment and Pan African University need to be seriously considered as this will ensure and give impetus for the African continent to protect the environment, promote peace and democratic governance in Africa. Paying tribute to Wangari Maathai will intensify efforts towards peace, environmental protection and climate change mitigation.

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