

PROFESSOR WANGARI MAATHAI



Professor Wangari Maathai, born in Kenya in 1940, dedicated herself to science and doctoral studies to PhD level. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree and found a position at University of Nairobi teaching veterinary anatomy. She became the first woman in the region to chair the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and later, an associate professor.

She was a member of the National Council of Women of Kenya from 1976-1987. During this time she founded the 1977 Green Belt Movement. She helped form grassroots organisations, whose goal was to plant trees with groups of women, to conserve the environment and improve their quality of life. In her time with the Movement, she helped women plant over 20 million trees on farms, schools and church compounds.

In 2004 she won the Nobel Peace Prize after being recognised for her: "persistent struggle for democracy, human rights and environmental conservation" and "playing a leading global role as a co-chair of the Jubilee 2000 Africa Campaign, which [sought] cancellation of the unpayable backlog debts of the poor countries in Africa by the year 2000", as stated in *Les Prix Nobel, 2004*.

At the end of 2002, Professor Maathai was elected to parliament with a significant 98% of the vote. She was then appointed as Assistant Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife by the president, in Kenya's ninth parliament.

democracy

empowering

conservation

human rights

NOMINATED BY: JEN DICKINSON

"Professor Wangari Maathai is inspiring because a small action - paying impoverished rural women to plant trees on their land- kick-started a grassroots social movement that empowered rural women to reclaim their country's land from deforestation, and ultimately helped to bring down Kenya's 24-year dictatorship."