



Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement and patron of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Billion Tree Campaign, recently passed away in Nairobi. She was 71 years old.

Professor Maathai was one of Africa's foremost environmental campaigners, internationally recognized for her commitment to democracy, human rights and conservation. She founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977, encouraging women in rural Kenya to plant trees in order to improve their livelihoods through better access to clean water, firewood for cooking and other resources. Since then, the Green Belt Movement has planted over 30 million trees in Africa and assisted nearly 900,000 women to establish tree nurseries and plant trees to reverse the effects of deforestation.

In 2004, the Nobel Prize Committee recognized Professor Maathai's lifelong commitment to environmental sustainability and the empowerment of women by awarding her the Nobel Peace Prize. She was the first environmentalist and the first African woman to receive the honour.

Professor Maathai was the inspiration behind UNEP's Billion Tree Campaign, which was launched in 2006. She became a patron of the campaign, inspiring thousands of people across the world to plant trees for the benefit of their communities. To date, over 11 billion trees have been planted as part of the campaign.

Speaking to her memory, Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, described Professor Maathai as a force of nature. "While others deployed their power and life force to damage, degrade and extract short term profit from the environment, she used hers to stand in their way, mobilize communities and to argue for conservation and sustainable development over destruction. She was, like the acacias and the *Prunus Africana* trees Wangari fought so nobly and assiduously to conserve, strong in character and able to survive sometimes the harshest of conditions. She was also immovable in the face of ignorance, political gamesmanship and wanton environmental destruction.

"Indeed she risked her life and limb on several occasions to campaign and coordinate women and young people through her work in the Green Belt Movement taking her messages, her charm, her unflagging humour

and optimism, conviction, honesty and intellect from her native Kenya to the highest international debates on climate change to biodiversity loss.

"In winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the world caught up with the essence and lifetime understanding of this special person: namely that environmental stability and sustainability will increasingly be crucial for a peaceful world and for overcoming poverty, inequality and meeting the rights of women. I am pleased that in some of the dark days of her campaigning, when not everyone welcomed her stance and commitment, Wangari was able to turn to UNEP for safety and sanctuary. She returned that support in so many ways by backing and battling for UNEP at home and abroad and by, for example, being a co-patron of



our Billion Tree Campaign.

"UNEP has lost a real friend and an icon of the environmental movement. But her work and her vision will live on in the millions upon millions of people - young and old - who heard Wangari's voice, resonated with her aims and ideals and like her rolled up their sleeves to design and define a better future for all."

Professor Maathai's unflinching commitment to human rights and democracy led to her appointment as a United Nations Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2009. Testament to her ability to reach communities around the world with her advocacy, Professor Maathai was the recipient of numerous awards from governments and international institutions. She received France's Légion d'Honneur in 2006, the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights in 2007 and Japan's Order of the Rising Sun in 2009. She received honorary doctorates from several universities.

Born near Nyeri in Kenya's Central Highlands in 1940, Wangari Maathai received her education in Kenya and the USA, from where she earned a Bachelor from Mt. St. Scholastica College and a Masters from the University of Pittsburgh. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree, obtaining it from the University of Nairobi in 1971. In December 2002, Professor Maathai was elected to Kenya's parliament and appointed Assistant Minister for environment and natural resources.

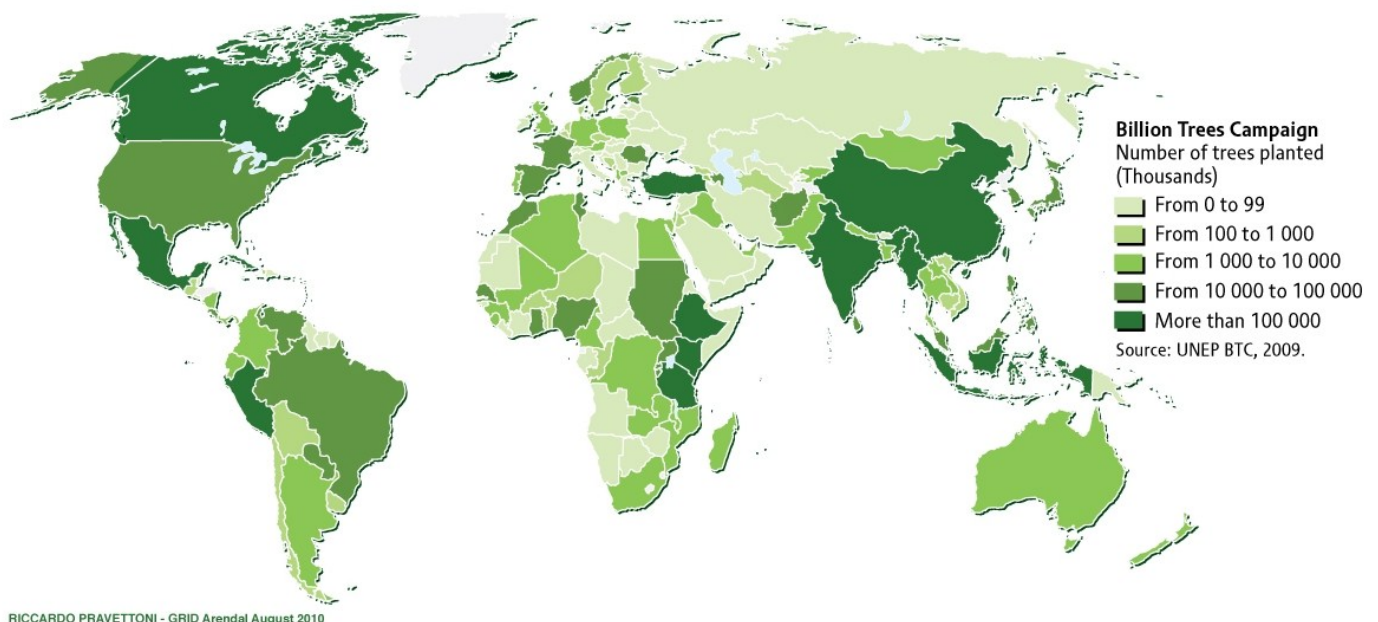
Professor Maathai is survived by her three children, Waweru, Wanjira and Muta, and her granddaughter, Ruth Wangari.



Under the **Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign**, people, communities, organizations, business and industry, civil society and governments are being encouraged to plant trees and enter their tree planting pledges on this web site. The objective is to plant at least one billion trees worldwide each year.

The idea for the Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign was inspired by Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize laureate for 2004 and founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement, which has planted more than 30 million trees in 12 African countries since 1977. When a corporate group in the United States told Professor Maathai it was planning to plant a million trees, her response was: "That's great, but what we really need is to plant a billion trees."

A worldwide effort. Recognizing that there are many tree planting schemes around the world, UNEP proposes to federate these efforts in both rural and urban areas. People and entities – individuals, children and youth groups, schools, community groups, non-governmental organizations, farmers, private sector organizations, local authorities and national governments – are encouraged to enter pledges on the online form. Each pledge can be anything from a single tree to several million trees.



The responsibility will lie with the person/organization making the **pledge via the campaign website** to arrange for the tree planting. All contributing participants will receive a certificate of involvement. They will be encouraged to follow up via the web site so UNEP can verify that the trees have survived, in partnership with certification mechanisms, such as the Forest Stewardship Council. The website will record the ongoing tally of pledges, and also publish photos and accounts from registered campaign members of what they have achieved.

The campaign strongly encourages the planting of indigenous trees and trees that are appropriate to the local environment. **Advice on tree planting (How to plant a tree)** is available via the website, as well as information about reforestation and other tree-related issues, including links to appropriate partner organizations best equipped to give locally tailored advice, such as the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). Because ideal planting conditions vary in different regions, the campaign will operate throughout the year.

Grow green with us. Join the campaign.
www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign

