Foreword [Volume 11 No. 5 (2011)]

DEDICATION TO BIG SISTER, THE ONE and ONLY WANGARI
MAATHAI

Wangari Muta Maathai died on 25.09.2011 at 71

Rest in Peace big sister! The Big smile will remain engrained in our minds and will always remind us of the very best NATURE can create.

As I release issue 46, I, like so many across the globe am extremely saddened by the sudden passing of our celebrated sister and the true embodiment of courage, passion and resilience and a role model for all women of Kenya and beyond. Wangari was the type of person you saw on television, read about in the print media and heard of in awe.
One could only admire her for her courage. She stood tall and did some very unbelievable things, out of this world and especially at the time.

She was way ahead of our times.

I came close to her in the 10th parliament in 2003 and thoroughly enjoyed associating with her, listening to her words of wisdom and would stay on in the evening if she walked in, to listen to her eloquence. After she received her Nobel Prize, the women in the 10th Parliament celebrated and even put a request to the powers that be that Wangari should be made a Minister at Large of Kenya, a Minister without portfolio, a position that could allow her to go as she wished to promote our country. We felt she had more than earned that position.

The world appreciated Wangari before we did in Kenya, and gave her awards which we only read about in the newspapers, and many we did not even get to know of. Wangari had a vision about the environment and paid dearly for her efforts to protect trees and forests, especially in Kenya.

Without Wangari, all of Kenya’s forests would be all but gone. Because of Wangari’s persistence, Kenyans, including school children understand now why we should not just cut trees, and why forests are vital for humanity’s very survival. She just was unique. With her around, whenever an issue came up of injustice, we knew Wangari would be there fighting for us. We did not have to worry.

Yes, we are mourning her, and we feel a big loss already. But, what a legacy this lady has left! She will never be forgotten because she has left a LIVING legacy. Wangari shed tears over killing of trees, Wangari was there with mothers of political prisoners (ready to undress), Wangari was there to stop a whole strong, feared government from mutilating the environment, Wangari fought relentlessly for justice and for what she believed to be right. BUT, there was a humble, tenderhearted, caring Wangari. That great smile says it all. Her unparalleled passion to save the environment gave her the energy to do it all. I KNOW what she did not achieve in life, will now be achieved in her death. She connected destruction of the environment with increasing hunger and poverty and with physical insecurity in Africa.

She connected it with corruption and bad governance, and with increasing intolerance between human beings. Her passion for these issues spread all over the world and thank God, by the time she died, Kenyans had started to appreciate what Wangari had been fighting for all these years. At the end of the day, Wangari was not the downtrodden Kenyan woman that she fought to see liberated; she had overcome that to become a true World Leader, in her own League, and a league she has opened up for all women of Kenya. Our new constitution, now in its 2nd year of implementation is all about people’s rights and has given Kenyan women exceptional democratic space. We shall always be indebted to Wangari for this and I am certain, the smile we see in the picture above and in the one below as she lies on the big indigenous tree, is the same smile (if not wider) that she carries now wherever she is, in our Maker’s house.

To celebrate Wangari’s life, let us each plant a Wangari Tree, this year, and make sure we take care of it. I bet it will grow to be as tenacious as its namesake.

Let me not forget to acknowledge the humility of our Government that has decided to give Wangari a state funeral, and to declare two days of national mourning by carrying the national flag at half-mast. This is recognition befitting a national hero. Even as the rest of the World mourns and celebrates her life, we Kenyans
need to be at the forefront of it all. For this moment, I am very proud to be a KENYAN. We thank Wangari for making us also stand TALL. May God rest YOU in Eternal Peace.
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Ruth Oniang'o
Editor-in-Chief

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