

Statement

By

Prof. Wangari Maathai

Nobel Peace Laureate

on behalf of Civil Society

at the

UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on Climate Change

22 September 2009

New York, New York

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government
The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Millions of people across the world have made a Global Wake Up Call on climate change calling on you to provide leadership, act together, act now and act differently. I am deeply humbled by the privilege to represent them.

Whether they come as erratic fires in California, devastating floods in Bangladesh, and West Africa or melting polar ice, the negative impacts of climate change are already here. Scientific evidence shows that future consequences will have even greater force, frequency and unpredictability.

In Kenya, ten million people are starving. Their crops are failing, their children are hungry, their fields are parched and their cattle are dying. Why? Because besides decades of environmental neglect and mismanagement, that made communities vulnerable, now we also have climate change.

Nobody can claim that they do not know!

Unlike other delegations and negotiators, you have the power to turn this around in Copenhagen. There is no time to lose. This is the challenge of all time. Addressing it will take collective political will.

That is why we need an institutional mechanism, a geographical information system, and equitable governance structures to channel resources efficiently and to ensure transparency and accountability.

No part of the world is immune. We are all in this together irrespective of our level of contribution to the problem. Business-as-Usual for any one would be a tragedy.

In the massive global wake up call your citizens have been calling you. I don't know if their calls are being answered but I do believe they need to be listened to.

As a Goodwill Ambassador of the Congo forest, I know that reducing deforestation and forest degradation is a vital piece of the puzzle. We can all reduce, re-use and recycle, a concept known as Mottainai in Japan, which calls for gratitude, respect and avoidance of waste.

Your Excellencies,

It is only ten weeks before Copenhagen, We, the Peoples of the World, the people you lead, are here to encourage you and support you to secure a fair, ambitious and binding deal.

We are all here first and foremost as inhabitants of this planet. Before being leaders, you are someone's mother, father, sister or brother. We appeal to you, our leaders, to personally go to Copenhagen, and for the almost seven billion people on Earth, seal a fair deal.

Thank you.