

Video Message by

Nobel Prize Laureate, Wangari Maathai

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on Africa's Development
Charlemagne Building
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Commissioner Michel, Ambassador Kawamura, Ambassador Annadif,
Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

Allow me to apologise for not being able to join you at this very important Japan-European Union International Symposium on Africa's Development. I would have loved to be with you and deliberate on this subject with you, but due to circumstances beyond my control I am unable to join you.

These issues of development and especially the current issue that is occupying many discussions, the issue of Climate Change, are issues we have been dealing with for many years in the Green Belt Movement, trying to make our people understand the linkage between the environment and our people's livelihoods. Many, many organisations, governments, and development agencies have engaged Africans at all different levels in an effort to develop, but Africa continues to be a continent occupied by the poorest people on this planet, while at the same time the continent is endowed with many resources. Obviously there is an irony here, and we must go deeper and try to find out why it is that we who live on this continent have been

endowed with so many riches and yet we continue to be poor. Our friends in Japan, in Europe, among the G8 countries have been engaging in dialogue, have been engaging in development efforts, and have even supported initiatives such as the Green Belt Movement.

In my humble presentation, and especially since I'm talking to you at a time when my country, Kenya, is engulfed in a very serious political and humanitarian crisis that Kofi Annan, and his team of Eminent Africans, Graca Mache, Mandela, and the former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, are assisting us. I want to present that the development of Africa is in the hands of the African leadership. For as long as the African leaders refuse to give better governance a chance, invest in their people, and encourage their people, allow for greater democracy or, may I just say better governance, respect the human rights, to help and enrich the energy trapped in their people. Invest in education, deliberately and consciously avoid conflicts and wars so that our children can go to school rather than go to war, or spend their lives in refugee camps.

Until we are willing to govern inclusively, allow as many of our leader to participate in promoting our countries, we may be going in circles. With our friends trying to help us, but unable to help us because we make it difficult for our friends to help us – we may be losing a great opportunity. And in as much as this conference is partly sponsored by Japan, and we are looking forward to attending the TICAD meeting in Yokohama, I want to call on us to reflect on a word that I learned in Japan – MOTTAINAI. It's a word that

regrets, laments an opportunity lost, an opportunity to use resources, an opportunity to dialogue, an opportunity to engage constructively so that we can truly make Africa a better continent for the African people, and all the people who live in Africa. This concept “MOTTAINAI” calls people in about the same spirit of “Reuse, Reduce, Recycle” – ‘the three R campaign.’ It also includes the concept ‘do not waste, respect, be grateful.’ This is a moment that we can all lament, practice ‘Mottainai spirit’; that we are given so much opportunity, but we throw it away – ‘what a mottainai!’

I hope that in this conference, in the conference later on in Yokohama, we shall be guided by this ‘spirit of Mottainai,’ and we shall commit ourselves, and especially as leaders of Africa, that we shall commit ourselves to not wasting such an opportunity that is given to us, and an opportunity that our friends want us to use. Let nobody in the future say “What a Mottainai, they were given an opportunity and they wasted it!” In the spirit of this very beautiful Japanese concept, I hope that you will have a very fruitful deliberation. And I look forward to seeing you in Yokohama as we continue in that spirit of not wasting opportunities given.

I thank you, and once again I apologise for not being able to join you.

Thank you very much.