



Message from Her Excellency Ambassador Koki Muli Grignon

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Celebration of the 2018 International Day of Forests

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For many people, the connection between forests and cities can seem tenuous at best. But forests, parks and trees provide tangible benefits for city dwellers, by providing cleaner air and freshwater, habitat for wildlife, reducing energy costs and mitigating climate change.

In 2000, Kenya's forest cover stood at 5.90 % [3,492,116.2 Ha] but by 2010, it had increased to 6.99 % [4,136,446,5 Ha]. It is projected that to increase to 10% by 2020.

Forests contribute about Kshs 7 Billion (\$70 Million) to Kenya's economy annually and employs about 50,000 people directly and another 300,000 indirectly. About 530,000 households living within a radius of 5 kms from forest reserves depend on forest for farming, grazing, fishing, fuel, bee keeping and derive their livelihoods from the forests.

The Karura Forest Reserve in the northern part Nairobi is one of the largest urban gazetted forests in the world. Karura is home to over 600 species of wildlife, an important water catchment area, and provides a vital carbon sink for industrial activity. The forest has some 50 km of nature trails, an environmental education centre, and is considered one of the top tourist attractions in Nairobi.

Karura Forest is also associated with late Prof. Wangari Maathai - who devoted her life to championing forests. She reminded us time and again that our lives depended on forests. In the 1977 when Wangari started the Green Belt Movement, she said she was responding to needs identified by rural women, namely lack of firewood, clean drinking water, balanced diets, shelter and income.

Karura Forest is widely known for being a forest within the city. But Kenya has a number of other Forests that unlike Karura, they are increasingly facing extinction. These Forests include Kakamega Forest National Reserve situated in Western Kenya, Mau Forest Complex situated in the Rift Valley and the largest indigenous mountain forest in East Africa. Others are Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests, Arabuko Sokoke Forest among others. We highlight these issues and challenges in order to draw attention to them and highlight why the Government of Kenya has taken drastic measures to conserve our forests.



Throughout Africa, women are the primary caretakers, responsible for tilling the land and feeding their families. Tree planting became a natural choice to address some of their most basic needs. To date, Green Belt Movement communities have planted over 50 million trees in Kenya, helping to restore degraded watersheds and improve the livelihood of the local communities.

The 2018 International Day of Forests, through its theme of forests and sustainable cities provides an opportunity to not just celebrate the importance of forests to sustainable cities and communities, but also to raise questions like - how can we strengthen engagement between forest managers and local governments? Cities stand at the forefront of innovation and climate action, as they tackle the complex infrastructure needs of building, transportation, water and waste while increasing sustainability and economic efficiency.

Global observances like the International Day of Forests are an opportunity to get informed, and translate our knowledge into action. In that spirit, I hope that the 2018 International Day of Forests will inspire action towards safeguarding the forests we have, and restoring the ones we have lost – as they hold the key to the future of sustainable communities everywhere.
