

*Address by HSH the Prince
Close of the "One Billion Tree" campaign
Moses Mabhida Stadium
7 December 2011*

Mr Executive Director of UNEP, Dear Achim

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

The Princess and I are particularly delighted and moved to be here with you today, for the close of the great five-year adventure that was Plant for the Planet.

Delighted, of course, to see the success of this operation that began with uncertainty, and sometimes even doubt, but which quickly proved its success.

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But also moved, remembering my fellow patron in this initiative who unfortunately passed away this year, Professor Wangari Maathai.

In addition to the great esteem and affection that I had for her, in addition to my memories of our working together for Plant for the Planet and my Foundation, I cannot help thinking of her now as I walk on African soil for this event.

Wangari Maathai's future was connected to this continent and she was one of its most eminent figures. But it was also connected to the trees that were always so much more than symbols to her, but true forces of life.

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From the first seven trees that she planted with the Green Belt Movement, to the Nobel Prize that was awarded to her in 2004, it was largely through her action around the forests that Wangari Maathai built her future, forged her philosophy and led her fights.

She paid for these fights with her flesh, the non-violent campaigner, who was imprisoned several times before being the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Convinced of the vital role of ecology in the advent of a fairer, more developed and more responsible society, she embodied and will long continue to embody a fertile alliance between man and his environment. ./.

She will therefore have left us millions of planted trees, the 30 million from the Green Belt Movement, but also the billions of trees resulting from the initiative that we are closing today.

Following her example, we must now continue her action, today celebrating the success of this operation with which she was involved, with the energy for which she was known.

Today, we pass the torch to the German Plant for the Planet Foundation. I have confidence in its leadership, whose talents I know and in its young ambassador and friend, Félix Finkbeiner. They will be intent on continuing and helping this wonderful initiative to flourish for future generations. ./.

Because, beyond the universal symbol that they represent, trees must continue to be central to the environmental struggle.

Vital for the balance of the biosphere, true water towers of our ecosystems, essential producers of oxygen, trees are also the references of our imagination. For all these reasons, the operation launched five years ago by the UNEP immediately seemed important to me and these are the reasons why it has encountered such success throughout the world, giving rise to unprecedented movements, far exceeding all our initial hopes.

Over 12 billion trees planted.

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Almost 3 billion trees in China, over 2 billion in India and hundreds of millions in various countries. This is an immense success and one to which I would like to pay tribute today. Behind these figures, I think of all those, anonymous or famous, institutions or individuals who have stepped up to the mark.

Twelve billion trees represent a considerable biological impact, in contrast to the slow decline of our environment. It is also the symbol of an exceptional movement and the sign of a new and shared awareness.

Thanks to all these men and women, companies and governments, who have made this mobilisation possible, we have rediscovered some hope.

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Not only for the future of our planet, that needs this biological boost, but also for humanity, which has gone back to the old, simple and essential traditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thanks to the conviction of all these volunteers, I know that we can tackle the challenges that threaten our environment.

As Professor Wangari Maathai said, “I have always believed that, no matter how dark the cloud, there is always a thin, silver lining, and that is what we must look for.”

Thank you.