

One world, one movement: Remarks by Jacqueline Patterson in a tribute to Wangari Maathai

GDRA member Jacqui Patterson kindly shares remarks made at a [tribute to Wangari Maathai](#)

Good Evening. On behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, we thank the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance and most especially Mithika Mwenda and Augustine Njamnishi for the honor of inviting us to participate in this tribute. The NAACP was founded in 1909 out of the struggle for equal rights of black people in the US, who were transported in the hulls of ships from here, the continent of Africa, to North America. We therefore share and embrace a common ancestry.

It is my great honor to stand arm in arm with my sisters and brothers here to pay homage to a Sister Wangari Maathai whose legacy embodies the struggle for earth rights and for human rights for all.

*When I hear the stories and see the pictures of the anti-apartheid movement I see parallels with our ongoing struggles for dignity and equal rights as African Americans. When I see the ongoing housing segregation here and the continued struggle for economic rights, I see a parallel struggle to what we are experiencing in the US. When I hear of coastal erosion and displaced communities in Cameroon and Benin, I think of Inuit communities and African American communities in Alaska and Louisiana respectively. When I hear of the deadly storm that took lives and destroyed homes, primarily of black people in Durban last week or the flooding last year in Madagascar, I think of the lost lives and homes of black people in Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. When I think of oil soaked coasts in Nigeria, I think of oil soaked fields in the bayous of Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida after the BP Oil Drilling Disaster. When I think of the extractive practices of mining for profit at the expense of people from the Congo to Swaziland, I think of our indigenous brothers and sisters in New Mexico and Nevada whose lands are desecrated and whose environment is being contaminated with no regard for their wellbeing.*

When I see that in “Post Apartheid South Africa” one is far more likely to see black people in servitude than in ownership, I think of the fact that out of the \$40billion dollars earned by the energy sector in the US in 2009, only .001 was owned by African Americans who make up 12% of the population.

Like Martin Luther King had a dream of equal rights for all which contributed to the growth of the civil rights movement, Wangari Maathai clearly had a vision gender and environmental justice through grassroots led environmental conservation and poverty reduction that led to the development of the Greenbelt Movement.

As you saw in the video, on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2009, the NAACP bestowed upon our sister Wangari Maathai the NAACP Board of Directors Chairman’s Award as part of our 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Image Award Ceremony because the Association recognized and applauded her leadership and vision and how it is part of the global tapestry of the social justice movement.

We warmly congratulate the Caravan of Hope for their sacrifice and leadership in carrying on this legacy by blazing a path across Africa carrying the torch of illumination of these issues and demanding justice, just as the civil rights freedom fighters used marching and rallying as major tools of the struggle in the 60s and still today.

The NAACP has forged a partnership with the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance and we look forward to our continued work in common cause to fight for just climate policy which includes drastic emissions reductions and just climate finance for mitigation and adaptation funding that is in the hands of the most affected communities and countries.

For our communities, enacting these policies and practices is not a choice. It is necessity for our survival. So we must do whatever is necessary to gain the power to ensure that this happens.

So I close with the words of Professor Maathai in her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, *“Those of us who understand the complex concept of the environment have the burden to act. We must not tire, we must not give up, we must persist.”* We as the NAACP are committed to our ongoing joint organizing in this struggle until we overcome..... and together we will win! Thank you.