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### **TAKING ROOT: The Vision of Wangari Maathai**

#### **AWARD-WINNING NEW FILM CONNECTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai*, a new film by Lisa Merton and Alan Dater, tells the inspiring story of the Green Belt Movement of Kenya and its unstoppable founder, Wangari Maathai, who, in 2004, became the first environmentalist and first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

*Taking Root* illustrates the development of Maathai's holistic worldview and model for sustainable development. Maathai discovered the core of her life's work when she turned her attention to the rural women with whom she had grown up in Kenya's central highlands. Their daily lives had become intolerable: they were walking exhaustive distances for firewood, clean water was scarce, the soil was eroding, and their children were suffering from malnutrition. One hundred years of colonialism and neo-colonialism had devastated the forests they'd lived with for centuries.

"Why not plant trees?" Maathai thought. Trees provide shade, prevent soil erosion, supply firewood, building materials, and produce nutritious fruit. In 1977, Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and began teaching women about the connection between environmental problems and their daily problems.

Through chilling first person accounts and TV-news footage, *Taking Root* documents the Green Belt Movement's dramatic political confrontations of the 1980s and '90s –a time when Maathai and other Kenyan women endured violent suppression, hunger strike, and risked personal injury. *Taking Root* also chronicles the women's successful political action in 2002 that helped to bring down Daniel Arap Moi, dictator of Kenya for 24 years. Contemporary *cinema verité* footage of the tree nurseries, and the improved lives of the women and children who tend them, is testimony to the power of Maathai's vision and the positive change it has brought about.

*Taking Root* captures a world-view in which nothing is perceived as impossible. Brian Miles of *Nashvillescene.com* describes the film as "...proof that one small voice of dissent can shake nations....an affectionate, rousing portrait."

In the coming year, *Taking Root* and related resources will be made available to schools and community groups through an ambitious grassroots campaign that will utilize Maathai's model for sustainable development, integrated problem solving and citizen empowerment.

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