THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AFRICA
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Co-ordinator, Green belt Movement

The Honourable Al Gore, Vice-President of the United States of America,
Congressmen and Congresswomen,
Distinguished participants:

I wish to record my deep appreciation for the honour and the warm invitation to participate in this meeting and, particularly, at this setting. I believe that it represents a genuine concern for Africa and her people and I am sure that many will welcome the hope this initiative represents. They will also follow whatever tangible commitments it will generate.

Some three decades ago, the political leaders of modern Africa had three major objectives in their minds as they became the first post-colonial African rulers, namely to decolonise the continent, to promote unity and to effect economic development. With the recent political freedom of Namibia and South Africa that generation of African leaders may consider their first agenda complete. But I think that decolonising territories is only the first step. A more difficult step is the mental and the cultural decolonization and these two have been ignored to the detriment of the people of Africa. This and the agendas for economic development and unity (both national and regional) are the challenges of the new generation of African leaders who are expected to free their people from fear and want and give them dignity. Five hundred years is a long time to struggle against oppression. Therefore, the task ahead is enormous because the battles of five centuries have left Africans weakened culturally, economically and politically. But above all it has left Africans without visionary leaders. The crisis we have in Africa is a crisis of leadership.

So how do we go about facing our current challenges and playing our role? In trying to answer this question, I draw upon some of my experiences.

I came to this country in 1960 and was among the first Graduate Fellows of the African American Institute. I, therefore, testify to the importance of education especially for women. Apart from my academic pursuits at the University of Nairobi, I have worked for the Green Belt Movement of Kenya, a national, indigenous and environmental organization, run mostly by women. This organization plants trees. It also informs,