

Before long, Wangari saw that one reason Kenya's forests had been getting smaller and smaller was that people in the government had been stealing forest land from ordinary Kenyans. Sometimes they used it for their own farms. Sometimes they gave it to rich people.

Wangari saw that because people in the government were to blame for so much of what was happening to Kenya's forests, she had to fight against those people if she was going to save the forests. She worked hard to stop the government's plan to build a tall building in a park in the capital city, Nairobi. She helped some old women who were angry because their sons and husbands, who were against the government, had been put in jail. When she found out about a plan for the army to take over, and that the President had agreed to this, she spoke out strongly against the government. And she fought with the police when they tried to stop her from planting trees on land where the government had cut down the forests to build very expensive houses. Because of all this fighting with the government, Wangari was beaten up several times and sent to jail several times. Once, she was beaten so badly that she almost died.

In 2002, Kenya got a new government and Wangari was chosen to be part of it. But even though she was inside the government, she kept fighting against it. In 2004, she told the government she was going to leave her job if they went ahead with their plan to cut down a forest and use the land for farming.

In November 2004, Wangari won the Nobel Peace Prize of 1,186,000 EUR. She said she was going to use the money to spread the Green Belt Movement around the world.

--information from: 'Eco-Heroes', Aubrey Wallace, Mercury House, San Francisco, 1993; Wangari Maathai's speech to the UN World Women's Conference, Beijing, 1995; Time (US), 98.12.14; The Sunday Nation (Kenya), 01.03.08, Muthui Mwai and Mugumo Munene; Washington Post, 04.10.09, Emily Wax; New York Times, 04.10.12, Wangari Maathai

holding down:

stopping earth from being washed away

kept on:

continued

washed away:

removed by water (erosion)

were to blame :

were the ones who harmed (hurt) the forests

were against:

were fighting, were enemies of

spoke out:

complained (criticized) publicly

beaten up:

hit many times (and hurt)