

## **Proposal to the Right Livelihood Award Foundation**

### **To introduce as a candidate for the award: Wangui Mbatia, Kenyan grassroots activist**

#### **1. Full address, e-mail, phone and fax (if available) of self and proposed candidate.**

The candidate:

Wangui Mbatia

Kenya Network of Grassroots Organisations (KENGONET)

Physical Address: Plot 485, Dagoretti Kinoo, Police Post Road,  
Opposite HGM Kinoo Primary School,  
Kinoo Village  
KABETE

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Proposer:

Jutta Sundermann

board and co-founder of Attac Germany

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#### **2. Nature and length of relationship with the candidate, mentioning professional, financial or political links, if any.**

Wangui came to Germany in 2007 for the first time, as a speaker about the upcoming G8 summit, invited by Attac. This was followed by a 10-day lecture tour on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) in 2009 and her participation in the Bank Tribunal of Attac in Berlin in 2010, combined with a tour on the impact of the global financial crisis in the South and several events on public private partnerships and the effects of privatization.

In 2011 a visit to Kenya was made in return. Three nationwide attac activists (Carolin Franta, Alexis Schwartz, Jutta Sundermann) stayed there for five weeks with Wangui, traveling to visit several members of their network; they had many opportunities to observe and discuss questions with the Kenyan activists.

After her trips to Germany Wangui got some used laptops, which she passed along to her peers in

the KENGO-network. From a small allowance she bought some simple tents and sleeping bags for networking meetings in Kenya.

We financed the return visit to Kenya privately.

### **3. The proposer's expertise relevant to this proposal, mentioning his/her occupation.**

Jutta Sundermann, born in 1971, has been an activist in German social movements for 20 years and is also a freelance journalist. She is a member of the "trustees of the foundation of movements" ([www.bewegungsstiftung.de](http://www.bewegungsstiftung.de)) and a co-founder of ATTAC in Germany and member of its board ([www.attac.de](http://www.attac.de)).

Her main issues are international trade and agriculture, especially banks and financial markets. She has had many experiences as a campaigner, especially with media-work and fundraising. She was one of the three German "attacies" who visited Kengonet in 2011.

### **4. Indication, with brief reasons, whether the proposal is intended only for cash or an Honorary Award or both. The Honorary Award is for candidates whose primary need is not cash support but who would benefit from the considerable recognition and publicity which a Right Livelihood Award generates.**

I propose consideration of both: the honorary award and cash.

Kengonet is short of money; they had to close a leased office in Nairobi a few years ago. A cash award would certainly promote the work and make possible some investments in infrastructure, as well as more frequent and more extensive network meetings.

Most members of Kengonet must earn their living, with monthly family income at less than 20 €, and can not financially contribute to the development of the network through their own resources.

Wangui does not need a lot of money for herself. She has her own little house and some land, puts her resources into the network work, and if she is running out, she works as a lawyer.

### **5. A brief summary (no more than 200 words) of the candidate's work. This paragraph will be the first information about the candidate our jury receives.**

The Kenyan lawyer and activist, Wangui Mbatia, brings together people and initiatives to fight for social justice, access to healthcare and education.

Informal networks like Wangui's KENGO and Peoples Parliament (PP) are gaining importance in a country where the government is considered to be corrupt and not trustworthy at all, while a great part of the active NGOs are strongly influenced by their own economic interests.

Although she has no official function, Wangui is strategist, speaker, research unit and developer of campaigns for the Peoples Parliament in Nairobi.

Wangui Mbatia is the founder of KENGO (Kenyan Network of grassroot organisations), in which hundreds of self-help groups and community-based organizations, some NGOs and some faith-based organizations are involved. They practice mutual exchange and organise political and everyday practical empowerment of the members.

Wangui vouches - sometimes at great personal risk - for the rights of the people of Kenya.

Associated with critical public relations, for example, she fights against the practice of Kenyan hospitals of confining people who cannot pay the cost of treatment and forcing the families to find the money.

The candidate also defends slum-dwellers who are permanently threatened with eviction by means of her legal expertise.

## **6. A statement setting out in more detail the reasons for the proposal and the candidate's special qualifications for an award.**

Not to give up hope - this is a particular challenge in Kenya. Life expectancy has been falling for some years, the country is ranked 143rd in the Human Development Index. The slums are growing, while local governments are helpless or even profit from the arbitrary taxes from the increased formation of slums. The exodus from rural areas continues unabated, access to water is becoming increasingly precarious, so-called Landgrabbing exacerbates the situation. The country suffers from tensions between different ethnic groups.

People's confidence in politics is extremely low. Since independence, all the leaders have been lining their own pockets and giving certain groups preferred treatment.

Wangui Mbatia belongs to those who do not want to wait for governments. She believes that people must take their own fate into their own hands and change it to something real. At the same time, the US-educated lawyer understands how to take advantage of the new constitution to help people achieve their rights, people who, given the many problems of the legal system, have no such opportunities otherwise.

While visiting Wangui and her network together with two colleagues from Attac Germany for five weeks, I was able to witness a lot of her work in practice.

In conversations with delegates and guests at several meetings which the UNDP organized in Nairobi, we met a lot of people sharing Wangui's hope. There is a trend towards greater self-organization in the population; a number of self-help groups and local initiatives are improving their exchanges with each other and show a lot of self-confidence.

### The most important aspects of Wangui's diverse activities

#### **As part of Kengo Net**

Wangui organized KENGO, the Kenyan Network of grassroots organisations, whose members fight together for access to healthcare, water and education. The candidate has a central role in this network, she keeps it alive, travelling a lot and visiting them, preparing meetings and consultation – also around special questions the groups have about their different original themes.

These primary themes of self-help groups include: income and empowerment for teenage mothers or the same for groups of HIV-infected women, the management of toilet facilities and environmental protection work by youth organizations, and the initiation of new community projects such as the establishment of schools and their improvement through the exchange of teachers.

Wangui also provides support with the legal registration formalities that are necessary so that a group is recognized by the government.

#### **People's Parliament (PP)**

The candidate has an important role in the development of strategies of the People's Parliament, that gathers daily in Jeewanjee Park in the centre of Nairobi. Her qualification as a learned jurist and the fact that she is an attentive news reader help Wangui a lot. She aims at increasing the effectiveness

of the Peoples Parliament, for which she repeatedly organises public relations.

An important example is the work of the new Kenyan constitution in which the PP fought for women's rights, land rights and the effective participation of citizens.

Wangui supported and assisted the process for the new constitution and campaigned extensively and critically for the Referendum in 2010. Thanks to Wangui's impulses and her persistence the People's Parliament was able to advance essential democratic rights, such as the equality of men and women and the right for land in the new constitution.

To this end she trained the members of the PP, organized meetings between politicians and PP, as well as actions and educational events.

### **Lecturing**

The candidate knows how to inspire in the customary mixture of English and Kiswahili. She empowers people with her dazzling energy, profound knowledge and her ability to link abstract topics directly to the life experiences of her listeners.

So she even convinces people to deal with major world economic issues, such as the economic partnership agreements with the European Union (EPAs), and the chance of and challenges for food sovereignty, as well as the impact of privatization.

### **Litigation training and legal advice for activists**

Wangui takes on mandates for her own financing only occasionally – living at a low cost level gives her time to be engaged for the networks.

Very important is her advice and assistance for people who work courageously for change at the grassroots level. In Kenya there is a lot of judicial arbitrariness, and there are often harsh police assaults on peaceful protesters. Wangui trains the defendants after such actions for their appearance in court.

Of great importance is also what she derives from the new constitution: She currently advises 600 families who, after being left homeless as a result of the violent riots following the last presidential elections in 2008, finally occupied and colonized a piece of land in the north-east of Nairobi. Under the constitution everyone has a right to a place to live. It is forbidden to evict people without compensation. Wangui wants to achieve an agreement that the dwellers can stay or get a better alternative site from the local authorities of Nairobi.

### **Empowerment**

Nearly every activity of the candidate is associated with her message that everyone can get involved, that it is necessary to think critically and that it is possible to develop Kenya.

Wangui invites those who hear her and her partner-activists again and again to argue for physical, gender, legal and political justice and equality.

### **Campaign for the discharge of people from hospitals**

For years Wangui has been fighting against the practice of hospitals of detaining patients until the bills are paid. She accuses the hospitals of human rights violations and calls for an end to this practice. She and her supporters very often manage to carry the issue into the media. More important to her is what she hears personally inside the criticised hospitals. It is often a tedious piece of research to identify those responsible for the deprivation of liberty. The direct involvement of the well-educated activist has led many times to immediate releases and forced politicians to act.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/13/kenya-maternity-poverty-detained-hospital>

### **Speaking Tours in Europe**

In the past few years Wangui has visited Europe several times for speaking tours that facilitate meaningful exchanges with ordinary citizens and activists in different areas. She reports her

experiences to her colleagues in Kenya. She is a critical observer of the situation in the countries she visits and can, therefore, establish a lot of parallels between them, for example, the extensive privatizations in Germany and Kenya. She welcomes protests in Europe which call into question the unfair trade policies of the EU towards African countries.

After a confrontation with the German school system, she proposed the organization of protest in Nairobi with children and young people against the too early division of the German pupils into different secondary schools.

### **Founding of ATTAC in Kenya**

Wangui has launched an initiative to set up a section of the Attac network in Kenya. Support assistance came immediately from several West African countries. In Togo, Ivory Coast and Gabon very motivated Attac-chapters have been established, as well as in Tunisia, Morocco and other African countries; they have been doing some networking on the continent.

During our visit to Kenya, there was an intense exchange, with the possibilities of a long-term cooperation. Wangui and her comrades are most interested in issues like agricultural policy (including GM and hybrid seeds), as well as privatization (especially in water) and experiences with the national debt.

### **Example of the success of "Wangui's Action":**

We witnessed an amazing piece of her work during her organizing of a school football tournament (with food and prizes for all participating schools in the slum Kiambiu / Nairobi).

Wangui, together with some fellow activists, organized a football tournament between 14 informal schools in the slums. A short-term success of the tournament was the fact that about 700 students spent an entertaining day together, and their teachers met each other for the first time.

Between the matches Wangui and the teachers discussed how to stay in touch permanently to improve the schools' situations in favour of the children.

Although in Kenya every child has the right to visit school for at least 8 years without fees, regular attendance is often unaffordable for the poorest families who have no money to pay for transport and the needed uniforms or books.

The football game was one example of Wangui's special ability to provide networking and take into account the different conditions of the people involved.

**7. An assurance that the candidate's work is sufficiently mature to justify a Right Livelihood Award. An award is likely to generate inquiries, requests for visits, etc., from people wanting to learn about the project. We do not expect candidates to have facilities for visitors or for dealing with large numbers of inquiries, but we do expect them to be ready and able to share their knowledge.**

### **To get in touch with the People's Parliament**

The People's Parliament is a citizens-run 'open space' intended to facilitate and enhance the participation of the people through public debates and discussions that will amplify the voices of the people in governance, law and democracy in general. The open space aims to facilitate the inclusion and uptake of the views of ordinary citizens, and to increase the opportunities for the direct, active participation of the public in building consensus and generating the solutions necessary for the realization of equality, social justice, equity and sustainable development. It aims to promote reconciliation and national cohesion, as well as peace and affinity building among Kenyan communities within the context of a devolved democratic government.

The oldest established People's Parliament is easy to access; it has been meeting at the Jeevanjee Gardens, a public park in downtown Nairobi, every day from 11am to 6 pm since 1992! There is

always someone present at the location, which is easily accessible.

### **Meeting of the Kengo-net**

KENGONET members are drawn from small registered groups, over 2,000 across Kenya. The groups are organised at the local level with network coordinators who, working on a voluntary basis, are available to organise network visits in any area across the country. The intimate nature of network relationships enables local network coordinators to organize meetings with any visitors very quickly. There are also thematic networks in KENGONET that can also be easily reached, for instance, the networks of women who make handcrafts.

KENGONET meetings happen in all places, including in towns and villages, because members are located everywhere and are free to organize meetings. KENGONET also collaborates often with other organisations and NGOs to carry out projects which can be formal or informal. Some meetings are held alongside other conferences (to save costs) but there are also meetings that are organized by KENGONET members themselves in Nairobi and other areas. Meetings are organized as need arises and also whenever there are active campaigns.

KENGONET continues to monitor the detention of patients in government hospitals across the country, a campaign that we began in 2008. It is possible for visitors to come along; in the past it has even been possible for the visitors to take pictures, and such visits have been documented by German and Norwegian TV crews. There are always obstacles, but we usually find ways around them.

**8. The jury cannot make an award in a particular area unless it has comparative knowledge of individuals / organizations engaged in similar work. Submission of information-seeking by the proposer, where possible, is very valuable therefore.**

Inquiries can be directed to Philo Ikonya, president PEN International, Kenya, Tel: + 4790504723, email [philo7626@gmail.com](mailto:philo7626@gmail.com), she is currently exiled in Norway.

Also Evans Wafula, a journalist who has worked with the candidate for years, email [wamwoyo@yahoo.com](mailto:wamwoyo@yahoo.com)

**9. Wherever possible, the names and addresses of two other qualified persons from different organizations who have agreed to support the proposal. At least one of these, again where possible, should come from the candidate's country.**

Germany:

In 2011 Wangui took part as a speaker in workshops and the final panel of the 6<sup>th</sup> „Stuttgart Open Fair“ in Stuttgart. This political festival has been organized since 2001 by 60 local and regional organisations, during the World Social Forum.

<http://www.sofa2012.de>, Mail: [info@sofa2012.de](mailto:info@sofa2012.de), Peter Streiff +49 711 - 615562 17, Johannes Lauterbach, +49 1577 - 1832424

With her were Chico Wittaker, who initiated the World Social Forum, and Pat Mooney from the ETC-group, a Canadian activist for sustainable, gmo-free agriculture (who already got the Award).

Kenia:

Mr. D.N. Ngatia, of CAREP, + 254 722760875;

he is a retired judge and Wangui works closely with him in CAREP.