

**STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, AT THE
FOURTH ANNUAL MET FIELD STAFF AWARDS CEREMONY,
HELD ON THE 16TH SEPTEMBER 2010, WINDHOEK**

Director of Ceremonies,
UNDP Resident Representative, Ms Kari Egge,
Entire Management of the Ministry,
Rank and File of the Ministry,
Heads of NGOs and other developmental partners,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is always a pleasure to officiate at this prestigious “Green tie” affair, where, once a year, we take the time to pay tribute to those among us who are the unsung heroes of conservation in Namibia.

I am talking of the people who are the backbone of our International conservation success. The men and women who are the Guardians of our own Eden, of our protected areas, who are, in their own, humble way, contributing to global conservation efforts more efficiently and effectively. They do so, not in international conference rooms but in open space exposed to weather conditions, wildlife and would be poachers.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Annual Field Staff Awards were inaugurated during the Etosha Centenary Celebrations in 2007. This is the fourth ceremony to be held. This year, they are of special significance as we celebrate International Year of Biodiversity.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Our Protected Area network, consisting of twenty (20) State proclaimed national parks, reserves and recreation areas. It covers nearly seventeen (17) per cent of Namibia's land surface. Together with private and communal conservation areas, the broader conservation network covers more than forty (40) percent – or two fifths – of the country. This is one of the largest and most dynamic protected-area networks on the African continent. It is also a remarkable contribution to international biodiversity, and is our gift to international efforts to conserve biodiversity.

Our protected areas provide refuge to a rich variety of species, some of which have either become extinct elsewhere or are severely threatened. These include the African elephant, black and white rhino, African wild dog and roan and sable antelope. They also shelter Namibian near endemic black-faced impala, Hartmann's Mountain zebra, and a range of endemic plants, insects, reptiles and other organisms. They also conserve important habitats.

Our broader protected area network has facilitated the reopening of wildlife migration corridors.

In the last two years, various projects and programmes have assisted us to translocate some of our rare and endangered species from our State protected areas to new homes in old range areas in communal area conservancies. Animals include black rhino, giraffe, eland and oryx and black-faced impala. Translocations are ecologically, economically and culturally significant to recipient communities.

Our State protected areas are managed and maintained in accordance with detailed management plans, which promote activities including water provision to game, wildlife crime prevention, inspections and law enforcement, human wildlife conflict management, infrastructure development and the involvement and participation of the rural community in wildlife management.

In line with National Development Plans, we are currently finalising plans for all national parks. This should lead to improved planning and greater benefits from these areas to the economy.

As we know, the tourism sector is one of the most significant economic contributors to our Gross Domestic Product. Our biodiversity and landscapes areas also draw hundreds of thousands of tourists to Namibia. To that end, they need to be protected and well managed by appropriate staff members.

Ensuring the protection of our biodiversity in protected areas about one thousand (1 000) staff are employed for that purpose.

They live in some of the most remote corners of Namibia, in harsh conditions, to ensure our precious biodiversity is conserved now and for the future.

The Government, through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, has realised the need to invest in both protected areas and national parks for a prosperous future. To that end, the annual budget towards conservation is increased nearly threefold in the last five years, from one hundred and eleven million Namibia dollars (N\$111 million) for 2004/5 financial year to three hundred million Namibia dollars (N\$300 million) in 2010/11 financial year.

Much of this money is spent on capital projects, such as roads, fences, staff housing and offices. The Ministry is investing in staff and parks for a better and brighter future for all Namibians.

Director of Ceremonies,

Tonight we have gathered to recognise and appreciate some of our staff members who have made outstanding contributions to biodiversity conservation.

They are among the finest of our Guardians of Eden. I would like to thank all of my staff for their hard work, dedication and commitment. I want to make it clear to you that, if the MET is seen to be providing good services to the people of this country, you are the driving force.

And I am happy and proud to work with a team like yours. There may be a few bad apples, but a large number of you, are a good team.

Director of Ceremonies,

As we celebrate the good work of the year, we need to remind ourselves that, now is not the time to rest on our laurels. There are reports that poaching in the sub-region is on the increase, as well as illegal trade in rare species products. For that, we must remain vigilant and work even harder as a team to counteract these evils and protect our national heritage from unscrupulous forces.

I would like to remind would-be poachers that the Namibian Government takes a harsh view of poaching, and we have some of the heaviest penalties in Africa for poaching of specially protected species.

Namibia has one of the best track records in the world for arresting, prosecuting and convicting poachers, according to the Elephant Trading Information System, and we must keep improving on that.

Our communities have also become our policemen. Poach a rhino in Namibia, and the blood of the people will be on your hands. You will not be poaching a State rhino, but will be stealing from our people, depriving whole communities of a livelihood.

In other words, Namibia's zero tolerance approach to poaching remains as ever and the heavy hand of the law will fall on any one found on the negative side of the law.

Director of Ceremonies,

Once again, I want to thank all our staff members working in protected areas and to wish you more strength to do your work with commitment and dedication. In the same vein, I congratulate those going to receive the awards today, you have worked for that and keep up the good work.

Finally, I thank you all for your presence here tonight. Let's work together to conserve our planet for the present and future generations.

I thank you