

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, MP

MINISTER

**AT THE SIGNING OF THE SEPARATE AGREEMENT FOR THE 2ND
PHASE OF THE BMM PARKS PROJECT AND THE GROUND-
BREAKING FOR CONSTRUCTION OF MAHANGO STATION**

20 FEBRUARY 2010

MAHANGO, BWABWATA NATIONAL PARK

10H00

KAVANGO REGION

Director of Ceremonies, MET Deputy Permanent Secretary,

Mrs Erika Akuenje

Your Excellency the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany,
Egon Kochanke

Honourable Governor of the Kavango Region

Fumu Mbamba of the Humbakushu Traditional Authority in absentia

Regional KAZA Coordinator

Representatives of Projects from North Eastern Parks

Deputy Directors of MET

Representatives of line ministries

Members of my staff

Members of support organisations

Residents and neighbours of Bwabwata National Park

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocol observed

As we have learnt during today's proceedings, within the framework of German Namibian cooperation, Germany through KfW has committed a further three million Euro (EUR3m), or thirty three million Namibian dollars (N\$33m) to our north-eastern parks, specifically the Bwabwata, Mudumu and Mamili national parks.

Furthermore, during recent bilateral talks the German Government pledged a another six and a half million Euro (EUR6.5m), which is about seventy one million Namibia dollars (N\$71m) in support of these parks, as well as Khaudum National Park, making a total financial commitment of twelve comma six million Euro (EUR12.6m) – or one hundred and thirty eight million Namibia dollars (N\$138m).

We are also witnessing the groundbreaking for the development of a new park management station here in the Mahango core area of Bwabwata National Park, thanks to the support of KfW and the staff of the Ministry.

The support of the German Government is a welcome injection into Namibia's local economy. It will go a long way towards helping to reduce rural poverty, meet Millennium Development Goals while transforming our parks into sought-after destinations for tourists in search of nature experiences. At the same time, by investing in our park infrastructure, our staff and planning for the future management of our parks, we are safeguarding the variety of life on earth, or biodiversity. Knowing that the United Nations has declared 2010 as the **United Nations International Year of Biodiversity**, paying special attention to our parks is our **humble contribution to the celebration of the year of Biodiversity**.

During this year, the world celebrates life on earth and the value of biodiversity to our lives.

In Namibia, this year coincides with the celebration of twenty (20) years of Independence, along with twenty years of existence of the Mudumu and

Mamili national parks, while Bwabwata National Park was proclaimed just over two years ago. These north-eastern parks are unique to Namibia in that they conserve our rivers, wetlands, woodlands, rich biodiversity and human history. They are home to our largest elephant populations, while other species that roam freely include buffalo, lion and leopard, the rare and endangered African wild dog, roan and sable antelope, hippo and crocodile, red lechwe, sitatunga and waterbuck. More than two thirds of all Namibian bird species are found here, some of which are listed as Red Data species.

More recently, giraffe, eland and sable have been reintroduced into our eastern Caprivi parks and neighbouring conservancies, further adding to the biodiversity of the area.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is working hand in hand with local communities to ensure that, in line with national development policies such as NDPIII, Vision 2030 and Millennium Development Goals, our biodiversity in protected areas benefits our people, particularly rural communities living in or alongside our national parks. In other words Namibia continues to implement its policy of sustainable utilization of natural resources, including plants and wildlife, especially as both are classified as renewable resources.

In Bwabwata National Park, there are currently three tourism concessions and one hunting concession that have been awarded to resident or neighbouring communities, and others are being planned. We believe through those concessions economic empowerment of the community will be realised through job creation as well as ownership of economic assets.

We many also know that the residents of Bwabwata National Park are permitted to collect devil's claw within the Park, a protected plant that is much in demand overseas. Scientific evidence supports the use of the devil's claw root to help relieve pain and inflammation in people with arthritis and other painful disorders.

This year, 530 harvesters have been registered, trained and will be monitored during the harvesting process. This is the first year that organic certification has been awarded for devil's claw in a national park – a factor which is hoped to achieve a higher market price for the product.

Most of the harvesters are women and the elderly, who can expect to receive between N\$800 and N\$1,000 each for their harvests, clearly demonstrating how our national parks are helping to reduce poverty in some of our most marginalised areas, while stringent measures are taken to protect our precious biodiversity. To ensure the sustainable use of our natural resources and to increase the income that communities generate from it, we need to invest in value addition to devil's claw so that it cannot only be sent out as a raw product. From 8 to 10 March 2010, Namibia will host the African Ministers conference on Access and Benefit Sharing in relation to Africa's biodiversity. Africa, including Namibia, is calling (advocacy) for an internationally legally binding regime to ensure that Africa benefits from its biodiversity whether it is processed in Africa or elsewhere in the world, whether it is used raw or processed into medicine or cosmetics.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The above-mentioned parks are all part of the Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA). .

The KAZA TFCA is the world's biggest TFCA, stretching two hundred and eighty seven thousand, one hundred and thirty two square kilometres (287,132 km²). This is about the same size as the country of Italy.

KAZA includes thirty six (36) national parks, game reserves, community conservancies and game management areas. Attractions such as the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, which is a World Heritage Site and one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and the World's largest Ramsar Wetlands Site, being the Okavango Delta in Botswana will be linked via the Caprivi Strip to our own natural wonders, such as the world-famous Etosha National Park. The five partner countries of KAZA TFCA, namely Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, are committed to finalizing and signing the KAZA treaty in the course of this year.

KAZA, which is also being supported by German financial cooperation to the tune of eight million Euro (EUR8m), which is about one hundred and eight million Namibia dollars (N\$108m) over six years, promises to be southern Africa's premier tourist destination with the largest contiguous population of the African elephant - about a quarter of a million (250,000) - on the continent. Conservation will be a vehicle for tourism thus bringing about the socio-economic development in this region.

And our north eastern parks are at the centre of this initiative. Already there is a marked increase in tourism to these majestic parks, as guided and self-drive tourists seek to explore these wetland areas and meet the people who live alongside Africa's magnificent wildlife.

It is therefore essential that as this area develops as a new destination, as our biodiversity protection improves, we have a blueprint for the future of these parks. One that takes into account our parks, their residents and neighbours, the biodiversity, our staff and national and international development goals.

Under the BMM Parks Project, not only has a vision been developed, but it has become a reality. Generous funding from the German Government has enabled us to draft park management plans, tourism development plans, build offices, staff housing, purchase equipment and train our staff to position north-eastern Namibia to become the heart of southern Africa's most promising conservation initiative.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to His Excellency the German Ambassador for joining us here today and to the German Government and KfW for their commitment to our development goals.

I would also like to thank the staff of the BMM Parks Project, my own staff here, other partners, local traditional authorities and communities.

Let us join hands as we start a year in celebration of our magnificent biodiversity, as we look forward to a decade of progress, commitment and exciting new ventures that will see this region firmly placed as a tourist destination, while conserving our natural resources, showcasing our rich culture and ensuring our protected areas benefit our people.