

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



**ADDRESS BY Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (MP)
Minister of Environment and Tourism**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**Opening of the World Tourism Day Celebration
Tsumkwe, Namibia**

25 September 2010

Tsumkwe

ADDRESS BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD TOURISM DAY CELEBRATIONS, TSUMKWE, 25 SEPTEMBER 2010.

Director of Ceremonies,
Honourable Governor of Otjozondjupa,
All the traditional authorities represented here
Invited Guests,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 27th September is a landmark being a day in which we must sit back and reflect on the successes and challenges in the tourism sector during the previous year. It is the day that, despite all the challenges that we are facing, we must pay tribute to the positive impact that the tourism industry had on the livelihoods of people all over the world, particularly in the developing countries. We are here therefore, to celebrate that day that, this year has fallen on a Monday.

At the onset, let me thank leaders and people of Tsumkwe for having accepted to host this year's Tourism Day Celebration. Tsumkwe and the areas surrounding it are among the places that play crucial roles in the tourism product on offer in Namibia. We observe pristine wilderness areas, culture and tradition as it once was, a diversity of flora and fauna, featuring some of the largest elephants in Southern Africa, and serenity. These are indispensable ingredients to offering a memorable experience to anyone who knows what to look for when on a tour. Tsumkwe was thus chosen as the host of this year's celebrations to ensure that it continues to be known as a destination and to highlight some of its attributes that may not be widely known by the travellers, including Namibians.

The global economic crisis has had a negative impact on the growth of the tourism industry. This year we also experienced the volcanic ash situation in Europe which had a significant impact on international travel. However, despite an increase in the number of tourists' arrivals, the industry has managed to ride out the storm relatively better than some of the other main industries, such as mining and fishing. While between 2006 and 2007 there was a healthy increase of 11% in the industry, the industry was swept up in the economic crises in 2008 with 0.24% increase but, in 2009 the tourism industry showed a slight recovery from the 2008 slump by recording a 5.27% growth.

The outlook for 2010 looks bright in terms of the recovery of the tourism sector against the backdrop of the recovery of the world's economies from the global economic crisis. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has indicated that during the first half of this year, 2010, there was a 7% growth in international tourist arrivals worldwide. We can draw positives from the fact

that there was a positive 7% growth in Africa the only region to show growth in the tourism sector during 2009. It is gratifying to note that Africa maintained this momentum during the first half of 2010.

The World Tourism Day is celebrated each year based on a theme selected by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation. The theme for this year is Tourism and Biodiversity. The largest portion of global biodiversity is in developing countries of which Namibia is also part. Namibia, like many other developing countries, draws tourists mainly because of its unique biodiversity and natural heritage. As many of you know we are blessed with breathtaking landscapes and wilderness areas which have enticed many a visitor. This is why Namibia has one of the highest return visitor rates.

Many explorers have recognised Namibia's beauty and have difficulty to describe it. One of them refers to Namibia as the Ageless land and yet another refers to Namibia as the Land God made in anger. This depicts already the challenge in presenting Namibia artistically given its contrasting natural features and resources. As Namibians, we need to know this country and we can only do so through travelling through it, thus becoming tourists in our own country.

It is encouraging that, Domestic tourism globally has increased over the last couple of years. It is reported that domestic tourism accounts for 30% of the total tourism market in Namibia. Although this is a good number we must still encourage Namibians to travel and explore the rich biodiversity which we have in order for us to enjoy our natural heritage. This will also contribute significantly to the conservation of Namibian biodiversity since it is much easier to conserve what you have seen with your own eyes rather than only hearing about it. There are today people in Namibia who have never seen an ocean, people who have never been to the desert, and many others who have never seen any of the big animals such as Elephants, Lions, Giraffes and Rhino's in real life. Foreigners know more about Namibia than some Namibians. This must change. We as Namibians must start to know our country and enjoy what it has to offer.

The Namibia Tourism Board (NTB) has recently launched the domestic tourism campaign. I am being informed that the reason that Namibians do not visit our tourist attractions as much as they should is because the various accommodation establishments are too expensive. Although this is a valid reason in some parts of our country, there are other options such as camping, which could be affordable and more fun. We, Namibians, need to explore our country, we must appreciate our country, and we need to protect and jealously guard our biodiversity. Furthermore, we need to learn a culture of saving, so that we can one day afford a memorable holiday in this land of contrasts. The tourists who come to Namibia do not just decide over night to do so, but they rather plan in advance and save money for years before going on holiday. This in part can demystify the notion that travelling domestically is expensive as this term is also relative. Travelling domestically has an added advantage of making the tourism sector less seasonal in that in winter when we want to hide away in our cosy homes, the foreign visitors fill our rooms and during summer when Namibia is too hot for our visitors, we want to be outdoors, relaxing and taking sips of our fresh air.

Director of Ceremonies,

There is one section of tourism that has remained largely untapped in Namibia. The attractions of Namibia's varied cultures and heritage have not been featured to any great extent in our Tourist package. Namibia is blessed with a rich and diverse cultural and traditional heritage of artists ranging from story tellers, poets, musicians and traditional dancers amongst others. I am very happy when I saw cultural performances at major occasions, which is a testimony of our rich cultural heritage. However, we should not only wait for those days to display our cultural heritage but it should be part of our everyday life. We need to take pride in our cultures and traditions, because this is what defines us as Namibians, and as a people. We also need to know that through cultural performance, the protection of biodiversity do feature very well. While encouraging the development of cultural tourism, I am fully aware that, if not well managed, it can be exploitative, however, that can not stop us to rejoice in our cultural heritage.

About three weeks ago, I officiated at the NTB Cultural day at Ongwediva Trade Fair. NTB hosted a cultural village during the Trade Fair and it was an excellent opportunity for one to learn about the cultures and traditions of the people living in the various regions represented in the cultural village. It was an event that made us proud. I hope to see more events like that across our country, as they celebrate our uniqueness, our tradition, our cultures and our heritage. Earlier this year, we witnessed the most magnificent tourism fair in Namibia, the Namibia Holiday and Travel Expo. Once again, the event was well organised and drew in Namibians from all walks of life to learn more and appreciate the beauty of their own country, with the aim of planting a seed in them to aspire to become domestic tourists. Culture and local cuisine also featured prominently at this event.

Cultural festivals in Namibia are one of the activities that illustrate that although we are diverse in nature, we are indeed united. The just ended /Ae//Gams Arts and Cultural Festival was one such event that can attest to this fact. It was held in Windhoek from the 8th to 11th September 2010, and featured music, theatre, dance children's art workshop, cultural performances and exhibitions. It also presented a platform for local artists to collaborate with several international artists. It pleases me when I observe how slowly but surely our artists are penetrating the international arena. During the World Cup in South Africa, we informed you that the cultural group, Bullet Ya Kaoko will represent Namibia at this world class event. I am delighted to inform you that they carried our flag high and astonished onlookers on their vibrant indigenous performances to the extent that the South African Government requested them to remain in the country much longer.

Director of Ceremonies,

Coming to the theme of the year, I would like to stress the importance of biodiversity for our tourism industry, not only in Namibia but worldwide. The world biodiversity is facing a serious challenge posed by climate change and land degradation. We must become more vigilant in conserving our biodiversity while at the same time utilizing it sustainably. For many countries in Africa, including

Namibia, their biological wealth constitutes one of their greatest assets in terms of national income. Since the income from tourism is much higher than what rural people can earn from other sectors, tourism has been accepted willingly in many rural areas of Africa. Tourists from other regions pay significant amounts of money to come and enjoy the wealth of fauna and flora as well as the unique African landscapes, environments and cultures.

The importance of the tourism industry cannot be understated. Not only does it generate much needed foreign currency but it has also proven to be a catalyst for poverty reduction, community empowerment, employment creation and rural development. Namibia's community-based natural resource management program, of which the community-based tourism is a prominent component, is highly regarded throughout the world. This is made possible by you, the people who live with the daily challenges of wildlife conservation. Within a relatively short time we have been able to restore some of our animal species, example lions, black rhinos and elephants to its former status and at the same time create meaningful income for communities through conservancies and the multiplier effect of tourism.

Despite the significant milestone that Namibia has made in the field of biodiversity conservation through community based natural resource management we still face internal problems, particularly in conservancies and communities. It is disheartening to still receive reports about disputes amongst communities, misappropriation of funds, and mal-administration. These are all problems of our own making and needs to be eliminated if we are to see our tourism industry growing and reaching greater heights. I have trust in you that together with the support organizations, the private sector and the line ministries we will eliminate these hindrances for the better good of the Namibian Nation at large.

Director of Ceremonies,

Namibia is not the only country that is hard at work to attract more tourists, we are competing with the whole world. To that end, we have to show the would be tourists why they have to come to Namibia and not the other country, hence the need for us to identify key areas in the Tourism Industry. In the tourism industry, service is key and there are many role players in the services sector of tourism. Service agent include; telephone operators at the Namibian Missions abroad , the one working at Air Namibia ticket office and airport any were in the world, flight attendance, airport officials, bus and taxi drivers, shopkeepers, hotel and other accommodation facilities, fast foods establishments, and the list is endless. We need therefore to continuously work on our service delivery. There is no short cut in doing things in the tourism industry. Therefore let us adopt a culture of excellent service delivery and see the number of tourist coming to Namibia increase significantly.

Finally, allow me to conclude by pointing out that tourism involves the movement of people from one place to the other and it is thus susceptible to the impact of HIV and AIDS. We need to be responsible citizens who are very careful with our conduct lest we also contribute to the spread of this epidemic. We need to make it our duty to fight this disease with our responsible behaviour

whenever we interact with domestic or foreign tourists. Tourism is a very labour intensive trait and if we are not cautious, HIV and AIDS will rob us of our well trained and experienced workforce. Recently, at RETOSA meeting member states to deliberated on the impact of HIV and AIDS on tourism as well as the impact of tourism on HIV and AIDS. As there is an intrinsic interconnectivity between the two, it was realised that there is a need to put mechanisms in place that will mitigate its impact. To that end, it was agreed that Policies at member state level have to be developed and implemented. Let me call on all Namibians to play their role in the development of the Tourism Industry.

I wish you all a blessed day.

I thank you.