

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



**OPENING REMARKS ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT
BY Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (MP)
Minister of Environment and Tourism**

**AT THE OCCASION OF THE 1st PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION SESSION ON
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

17TH MAY 2010

Honorable Speaker,

Hon Ministers,
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 1st Parliamentary Information Session on Biodiversity Conservation and Development, an event hosted in honour of Namibia's Parliamentarians by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and its strategic partners. Overall, this event aims to promote awareness on our rich biodiversity and how it is link to development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may all be aware, the United Nations General Assembly has, with a view of engaging people all around the world for protecting life on Earth, declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity.

What is this word Biodiversity that we hear about very often? Biodiversity is not just about the plants, animals and insects, it is about life, it underpins our survival on this planet. We need to demystify this concept so that everyone knows what it entails, For example, we make use of biodiversity products and services every day in our daily lives yet we take these services of nature for granted. Biodiversity is one of the country's most important assets contributing significantly to the national revenue. We are exerting pressure on our life supporting system.

Today for example, the ecosystems that sustain human survival on this planet are under massive threat worldwide. Changes to habitats, over exploitation of both renewable and non-renewable natural resources as well as environmental pollution are reducing biodiversity and destroying ecosystems compromising the benefits and services they provide. May this day and event serve as a reminder of the importance of Namibia's biodiversity and a wake-up call about the devastating loss we are experiencing as irreplaceable species become extinct at an unprecedented rate. We really need good biodiversity awareness at all levels, be it at Executive, Judiciary, and Legislative. This will enable us to develop a good legislative and make informed decisions that will ensure the protection of environment and human health, avoid biodiversity loss and to ensure crucial environmental services.

The International Year of Biodiversity therefore is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us to raise local awareness of the importance of biodiversity and its conservation for our health, wealth, food and survival. Indeed for our life.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is embarking on a concerted awareness, education and information campaigns starting to highlight the importance of biodiversity to Namibia's economy, its people and the environment and some of our achievements in this field. This is being done through

the National Steering Committee for the International Year of Biodiversity. Major events in celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity are set out in the national biodiversity celebration calendar which is also availed to you. We urge you all to support and get involved in these activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Biodiversity is the premise on which every aspect of human well-being and the achievement of our national development goals depends. The sustainable management of our biodiversity can only be tackled by taking into account the multidisciplinary dimension of the challenges it presents. This is where our Parliamentarians can effectively contribute to building and filling the gaps in the scientific knowledge base on biodiversity, by taking the political, cultural and socio-economic dimensions of biodiversity use into account and by raising awareness, educating and communicating on the vital importance of its sustainable use.

This gathering here today, we believe, will further play a significant role in sharing and learning knowledge, information exchange and experiences that will enhance the protection and sustainable using of our biodiversity resources. This session, therefore, is aiming at two objectives; firstly to bring together all Parliamentarians to increase their understanding of the meaning, value, status and challenges to biodiversity conservation for development in Namibia; and secondly to engage in discussions aimed at transforming political commitment by bringing together Namibia's political leadership and environmentalists to jointly pave the way forward and enhance the conservation of biological and cultural diversity as a key basis for sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of the Republic of Namibia has a strong commitment to biodiversity conservation for development. Namibia was quick to realise the importance of biodiversity, and included a responsibility to safeguard biodiversity conservation in Article 95 (L) of the Constitution. Since then it has also ratified the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and is also a party to the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species.

Our country offers a very wide variety of habitats and ecosystems which are home to a very rich number of species and also a high number of endemic species. These species of flora and fauna have been the basis of the livelihoods of rural people for centuries, and they also represent a significant national asset and are playing an important role in attracting tourists to the country. We are fully aware of the challenges to biodiversity conservation when it comes to balancing the socio-economic aspirations and conservation needs.

Environmental degradation, biodiversity loss is one of the main imbalances of our time. Thus commitment for integration of biodiversity conservation into development objectives need to be at the highest level: nationally, regionally and internationally as well. I believe this is the time and opportunity for us to address the issues and to find the solutions. We need to translate our words

and commitments into the actions which cannot be done alone by this Ministry, but by all of us in partnerships in effective ways.

Preserving our precious biodiversity is not only essential for development and security, but to our survival on this planet. Hence, we all have a role and a stake in conserving biological diversity to sustain life everywhere and in all its forms. "It is too late to undo the damage the planet has suffered, but it is never too soon to start preserving all that we have left" Ban Ki-moon (UN Secretary-General). May this Parliamentary Information Session inform us and unite us in this mission.

Thank you very much for your attention and I hope that this Session will be ending with great success. From me and Ministerial staff, we wish you have a pleasant information enrichment session from our panel of scientist and experts as well as the hospitality of the host institution.

I THANK YOU