

**STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE NETUMBO NANDI-  
NDAITWAH, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM,  
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE FISH RIVER CANYON  
VIEWPOINT AND LAUNCH OF RECONNAISSANCE FOR  
ORANGE RIVER FESTIVAL, HOBAS, 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2010.**

Director of Ceremonies, Mr. Saul Kahuika,

Hon. Governor of the Karas Region, Dawid Boois,

Hon. Local Councillors,

Hon. Chiefs and other representatives of Traditional Authorities  
of this Region,

The Resident representative of the UNDP, Ms. Kari Egge,

Chair of the Board of Namibia Wildlife Resorts, Jackie  
Asheeke,

Officials of DEA South Africa, SANParks TFCA Unit and  
SANParks Northern Cape,

Staff Members of MET,

Officials of line Ministries and Projects,

Representatives from Peace Parks Foundation,

Representatives of Community Based Organisations,

Representatives of NGOs and Donors present here today,

Captains of the Industries,

Church Leaders,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen, All Protocol Observed

It is gratifying for me to be here, at one of the world's most breath-taking natural wonders, the Fish River Canyon and I hope you all feel the same. I believe the feeling you have will enable you to understand why our protected areas are of great value to our national economy.

Namibia's protected areas generate in the order of two point four five billion Namibia Dollars (N\$2.45 billion) annually, with about one hundred and eighty thousand (180 000) visitors drawn to the scenic beauty, wildlife and tranquillity in our twenty (20) State-managed parks in the same period.

The /Ai-/Ais Hot Springs Park here in southern Namibia has the potential to draw even more tourists. This will help to further develop the south, generate income, create jobs and fight poverty. The park has grown from what was the humble beginning in 1968 with the proclamation of the /Ai-/Ais Hot Springs Game Park. It includes the Huns Mountains, and now is part of the /Ai-/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (ARTP). I am informed that Sendelingsdrift border post that was opened in 2007 as a direct result of the ARTP is showing encouraging results in terms of the number of tourism traffic making use of that border post.

The /Ai-/Ais Hot Springs Game Park attracts more than sixty thousand (60,000) visitors each year and generates the third largest income through park entry fees to the State after the Etosha National Park and Namib-Naukluft Park. Between April

2009 and March 2010, gate revenue from the Hobas gate entry totalled nearly four million Namibia dollars (N\$ 3 960 209). The number of visitors to the Fish River Canyon recorded at the Hobas Entry Gate from January to December 2009 was thirty six thousand, two hundred and twelve Namibian Dollars (36 212).

Although the area is not known for its wildlife, it is rich in endemic vegetation, and is a botanical wonderland during good rainy seasons. It falls within the unique Succulent Karoo and Nama Karoo biomes, and many of the plants found here are not found anywhere else in the world. So precious are these flora that the Succulent Karoo Biome has been designated as a Biodiversity Hotspot by Conservation International.

The ancient Fish River Canyon, one of the largest in the world, draws hundreds of thousands of tourists annually. And there is potential to increase the number of visitors. In recent years, several lodges and tourism facilities have mushroomed in the area, while the Namibia Wildlife Resorts has renovated facilities at /Ai-/Ais to add world-class visitor facilities to their suite of products. These accommodation establishments provide luxury and comfort for visitors keen on seeing the South's many attractions, while providing employment and generating income in the Karas Region.

### **Director of Ceremonies,**

In line with the National Development Plans, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is finalising park management plans for all national parks. The Management Plan for the /Ai-/Ais Hot Spring Park is complete and will act as a blueprint for activities

and management in the park. I am fully aware that this park requires substantial capital investment to enhance its income-generating capacity and to contribute to the realisation of Vision 2030.

About N\$4 million is required for the basic infrastructure to be improved on, to ensure that, the anticipated development along the Orange River which may have a high Environmental impact are controlled and managed in the right way.

Together with some partners, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism has already begun to invest in infrastructural development aimed at improving tourist facilities, offices and staff accommodation.

Already, a new office and staff accommodation at Aus is constructed. That means, our staff are now accessible to the people of Karas Region and visitors alike. The staff accommodations at Keetmanshoop, Karasburg and at the Ariamsvlei border post are also renovated.

This year, an office at Oranjemund for the management of Sperrgebiet National Park, a new office at Naute Recreation Resort, the regional office in Mariental and an office at Zais in the Namib-Naukluft Park will be build, while the road to Sesriem Canyon will be rehabilitated. In taking care of the famous wild horses of the Namib, the Ministry is planning to refurbish the viewpoint at Garub in the Namib-Naukluft Park.

## **Director of Ceremonies,**

It has to be accepted that the future of conservation and tourism in this area depends on smart partnerships. Partnerships with our neighbour, South Africa. Partnerships between the various regional authorities, donors, private sector, institutions and the communities of the Karas Region. I believe that through these partnership, benefits to the people of the region will be delivered.

Already, the Ministry has awarded concessions to tour operators to run viable businesses in the south. Communities are also assisted to establish campsites, meat handling facilities, and to boost local wildlife populations, games are translocated into conservancies.

The facility we are inaugurating today also adds value to the entire /Ai /Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. It will improve the visitor experience and increase tourism flow between Namibia and the Republic of South Africa through the ARTP.

Much care has been taken to provide visitors with a comfortable facility that is eco-friendly and blends in with the landscape. I understand the stones in the gabions we see were used to reduce wastage, while much emphasis was placed on building a low-maintenance facility with a long lifespan.

The building is also constructed to minimise vandalism – from humans and “our friends”, the baboons - as well as to withstand weathering from sun and wind.

As there is no permanent water connection in the area and water is very expensive to supply, ablution facilities are making use of a special water-conservation system that re-circulates the water for flushing and cleans it between flushes in a four-chamber septic tank with bacteria.

I learnt that one tank will use about six hundred (600) litres of water per year compared to about thirty thousand (30 000) litres per year that would be used if conventional flush toilets had been installed. And the Solar power operates the pump and lights.

The interpretive information materials consist of panels with information on the park, geology, fauna, flora, history as well as the culture of the local people is very important and must be well maintained. Furthermore, it is encouraging that an Environmental Code of Conduct for visitors has been developed as part of environmental education.

At this stage, I would like to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) represented here today by Ms. Egge, UNDP Resident Representative, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Strengthening the Protected Area Network (SPAN) Project, who together with the

MET have funded the upgrade of this world-class tourism facility for the Fish River Canyon Viewpoint.

**Director of Ceremonies,**

After this inauguration, I am going to launch a reconnaissance activity related to an exciting, unprecedented and unique tourism product for the ARTP, organised by the Joint Management Board of the ARTP. I am informed that this envisaged product is about adventure tourism and involves mountain biking at night in full moon (both in Namibia and South Africa), canoeing on the Orange River and running. This is a trial run in which staff members of the MET; Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) of South Africa, the South African Parks Board (SANParks), communities from the Karas Region and Richtersveld and TransHex mine will participate.

I am also informed that, staging this trial event was a partnership effort by Namibian and South African stakeholders. For this reason I wish to thank DEA MET, South Africa, SANParks, Peace Parks Foundation, TransHex Mine, RoshMed, and Southern Communications for their contributions.

I noted on the program that the organisers of the event will have a workshop at Sendelingsdrift on 23<sup>rd</sup> October to explore the possibility of developing this initiative into a full cross-border tourism product that will be outsourced and staged on an

annual basis. I look forward to the report of the trial event as well as the outcome of the workshop.

It is my hope that stronger partnerships with the Republic of South Africa in conservation and tourism through initiatives like the /Ai-/Ais Transfrontier Park, will serve our nations well, and bring development, employment and prosperity to the people living around these areas, while bringing global attention to the rich biodiversity and natural wonders that we offer. It is through progressive and far-sighted policies and legislation of both of our nations that we can share these God-given attractions with the world.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the staff of the Joint Management Board of /Ai-/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, under the leadership of Mr Karl Mutani Aribeb the international Coordinator, for the hard work and for the vision you all have for this Park.

Let me also thank and congratulate all those going to take part in the reconnaissance activities.

I thank the media for taking the message within our two countries and beyond. I thank you all for coming.

I now have great pleasure in declaring this new, world-class Fish River Canyon View point officially open.

**I thank you.**