

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



OPENING STATEMENT
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**AT THE OCCASION OF THE JOINT MET/UNAM SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM ON
BIODIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT TO CELEBRATE THE INTERNATIONAL
DAY ON BIODIVERSITY 22ND MAY, AT THE HABITAT RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, IN KATUTURA, WINDHOEK**

21ST MAY 2010

Director of Ceremonies,
UN Resident Representative
UNAM Pro-Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration
Directors/ Deputy Directors of various Ministries
Symposium Conveners
Distinguished delegates

Tomorrow, marks the International Day for Biological Diversity which forms part of the United Nations environmental events calendar. This symposium is organized as part of the commemoration of this day. It aims to increase the understanding of the important role biodiversity playing in our life. The symposium also provides an opportunity for us as a nation to make a critical analysis of the status of biodiversity at both local and international level.

It is an honour therefore and a privilege for me to be here today and participate at this joint MET/UNAM Scientific Symposium. The focus of this scientific symposium, namely “The Importance of Biodiversity in Combating Poverty and in Achieving Sustainable Development” is very significant and timely. It is significant that this year the day is celebrated in a special way, being an international Year of biodiversity under the theme “Biodiversity for Development and Poverty Alleviation”. This explains why we have a symposium as opposed to a normal meeting which may not necessarily generate discussion among participants. The title of the symposium and the theme of the year therefore, remind us of the unique contribution of biodiversity to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty alleviation.

Two weeks ago, May 7-9, 2010, Namibia launched the celebration for the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) at Brandberg in Erongo Region, with the first ever

biodiversity action day in Namibia. In the same vein on Monday 17th May, the Ministry and its strategic partners hosted a Parliamentarians information sharing session on biodiversity and development. All these series of these important events are aimed at raising public and political awareness about the need to preserve our biological diversity on Earth. Biological diversity is defined as all living organisms. This includes plants and animals we use for basic food and fibres, many thousands of wild plants and animals have great economic and cultural importance, providing food, medicine, fuel, clothing and shelter for vast numbers of people throughout the world. Biodiversity is also central to maintaining ecosystem stability, and play a key role in supporting life on our Planet.

I am happy to learn that at this symposium you will share lesson learn from Brandberg as that was a unique opportunity when a variety of stakeholders have jointly explored and analyzed the rich biodiversity and ecosystem services of Bradberg, thus realizing the social and economic values of those natural resources.

Ladies and gentleman,

Biodiversity's capacity to deliver benefits to the poor is diminishing around the world. In fact, poverty and hunger are worsening as ecosystems unravel and water and soil resources continue suffering from disruption and over-exploitation.

Reversing ecosystems' degradation while meeting an increasing demand for their services is a challenge. This challenge however, can be met through significant changes to policies, regulations and practices.

That is why in 1990, the founding father and mothers the Namibian Constitution adopted the clause that aims to protect our biological diversity. The long-term objective of that clause is to ensure that government continues to formulate laws and regulation that prevent loss of biodiversity.

In 2002 a Namibia National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan was adopted. The amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance to incorporate sustainable use and benefit-sharing incurred from natural resources management contributing to poverty alleviation and sustainable development was affected. I may inform you that the MET is in the process of updating the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan which will further go a long way towards facilitating biodiversity conservation in line with the national development objectives.

To successful realise our national goals, it is important stimulate a broad-scale engagement from all stakeholders. And this symposium demonstrates how our institutions could partner together to strengthen our capacity and share experiences which enable us to manage our resources better. Similarly, this symposium presents to us an opportunity to reflect on the level of implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in particular that the title of the symposium has a link on the international negotiations on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) Namibia as a major player in those negotiation would like to see an international legal bidding regime agreed upon and the CBD Conference of the Parties to take place at Nagoya, Japan, October this year. Against this background I want to assure you that the discussions of today and the outcomes of the symposium will enrich our negotiation team on ABS. ABS is very crucial for Africa and Namibia, because our countries are host of variety of valuable plants which must be used to the benefit of our people. We have lost a lot in terms of minerals - can we afford to safer the same fate when it comes to plants and other living organisms?

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2002, world's leaders have agreed to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Sadly, the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook which was launched by the UN Secretary General on 10 May this year, concludes that the targets have not been met instead the biodiversity loss is on the increase.

The consequences of this collective failure, if it is not quickly corrected, will be severe for us all. 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 closer home. Our "oshanas" in the north-central have been invaded by invasive species which are the manifestation of degraded ecosystems. Thus, we need to collectively design research proposal which will investigate what is really taking place and what could be done. No long-term effort to save life on Earth can be successful if we do not understand the importance of preserving biodiversity being the core to life. Therefore during this year it is important that we give full support to activities aiming at conserving biodiversity, now and in future while pursuing our developmental goals.

Ladies and Gentleman

As Namibian we must be proud that our country offers a wide variety of habitats and ecosystems which are home to a very rich number of specie including high number of endemic species. These species of flora and fauna continue to be the basis for our economic development. Therefore commitments for integration of biodiversity conservation into development objectives need to be at all levels, nationally, regionally and internationally. I believe this is the time and opportunity for us to address issues and find best solutions. Time has come to translate our words and commitments into the

actions. And this is indeed collective responsibility of the State, NGOs and the private sector.

Finally, it is indeed a pleasure for the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to host this symposium together with the Department of Biological Sciences of the University of Namibia. I wish you all the success in your deliberations, a rewarding international day of biodiversity and a year filled with innovations that will lead us to balance between biodiversity conservation and development.

I THANK YOU