

**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM**



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY Honourable Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (MP)  
Minister of Environment and Tourism**

**AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**

**04 JUNE 2010**

**KEETMANSHOOP, KARAS REGION**

Director of Ceremonies,  
Honourable Governor of the Karas region,  
Honourable Councillors,  
United Nations Resident Coordinator and  
the UNDP Resident Representative to Namibia,  
Acting Chief Executive Regional Officer of the Karas Region,  
Mayor of the Town of Keetmanshoop,  
Chief Executive Officer of the Keetmanshoop Municipality,  
Government Officials,  
Representatives of NGOs, Business, Civil Society, and Youth Leaders  
Members of the media

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the onset, I would like to thank the residents of Karas region under the leadership of the regional governor Cde Boois for having accepted to host 2010 Environmental World Day. May I also thank you for the support you have rendered to the staff of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in the organisation of the celebrations that started since the 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

The World Environment Day is a reminder to show our gratefulness to Mother Nature, which sustains all forms of life. This is the day to focus our thoughts and our energies to make collective efforts towards protecting the environment.

This year, the United Nations has given a very appropriate theme for the Environment Day which is, “Many Species. One Planet. One Future”. This theme is in line with the International Year of Biodiversity and is an urgent appeal to each one of us to recognize the significance of “Biodiversity” on this planet and the role each one of us can play to preserve it.

Based on this year’s theme, we found it appropriate to host the celebration for the World Environmental Day in Karas being the seat of one of Namibia two hotspots with high endemic and species, richness in the succulent Karoo biome. This also explains why Sperrgebiet was proclaimed a National Park last year thus bringing the total country land area covered by protected areas to 17%, while the area under conservation stood at 40%. Sperrgebiet National Park is located in the internationally recognised Succulent Karoo Biodiversity hotspot and contains an astonishing diversity of plant life.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We should be proud of our country’s natural endowments and unique biodiversity. Although an arid country, Namibia has a relatively high level of endemism in plants and animal species. This is profound in the more arid western zone of the country especially the Namib low lands as in the Karas region. Because endemics have a small distribution area, they are more vulnerable to extinctions when pressures such as alien invasive or habitat destruction take place. Thus,

conservation efforts focusing on high endemism areas are essential in reducing the loss of species. As mentioned above, Namibia's two hotspots, with high endemism and species richness are the Succulent Karoo biome in the south-west (Karas region) and the Kaoko area biome in the far north-west (Kunene region) located within this endemic zone.

The World Environment Day is also an opportunity for us to raise awareness on the importance of protecting and conserving our ecosystem, and in particular to encourage the preservation of our endemics most of which are found in this region. I therefore call on all of us to serve as active agents in creating environmental awareness. As we may know, endemism is a critical ecosystem which is rich in biodiversity, it is non-renewable, if we destroy it - it will be gone forever.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism has drawn many policies, programmes and activities to conserve biological diversity and to combat environmental degradation. The loss of biological diversity has great consequences for our life on earth. We depend on the wealth of flora and fauna to survive.

In Namibia, rights for the environment protection have been fostered into the Constitution. It provides a strong impetus to safeguard our biodiversity and ensure the long term flourishing of our communities. Namibia ratified several international

agreements, more importantly the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) as a means of protecting the abundance and diversity that so many Namibians directly depend on for their livelihoods.

Our policy objectives are to conserve biological diversity, use it in a sustainable manner, and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits in the utilization of genetic resources. In this regard, a National Biodiversity Programme was set up to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and lessons learned from this programme have fed into a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan covering the timeframe 2001-2010, which is now under review having entered its last year.

The many successes with regard to biodiversity in Namibia has undoubtedly been based on a sound policy framework that has been well implemented. The Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996 which paved the way for the establishment of conservancies is the most obvious example of this. In addition, biodiversity has been mainstreamed into our macro-policies of NDP3 and Vision 2030 such that development takes place with rather than against our natural resource base. Effective biodiversity conservation has much potential to drive efforts to combat other challenges facing rural areas such as climate change, desertification and alien invasive species.

Other draft legislation on Access to Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge as well as Biosafety and Biotechnology will help to ensure the future of biodiversity conservation in Namibia, once they become laws

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have to accept that our biodiversity does not only provide us with our most basic needs such as the air we breath, the water we drink and material we use for shelter, if well managed, it can provide us with cash that we may use to get other services that are necessary in today's world. For example, sending our children to school and as we know that education is the key to fight poverty. Proper utilization of our natural resources will lead to employment creation and that is a grantee for peace and stability in any given community and nation.

It is encouraging that most of our people espeially in rural areas have accepted to be agents of conservations, hence an increase in the number of conservancis in Namibia that currently stand at 59 with a population of 230 000. To appreciate the efforts people have made to conserve our biodiversity and to demonstrate the value nature of our natural resources, a programme called innovating grant mechanism, whereby communities are given grants to embark upon projects that will add value to our natural resources with the aim of generating an income and to reinforce the principal of sustainable utilization of natural resources was initiated. The innovative grant mechanism is implemented within the Country

Pilot Partnership (CPP) programme being core funded by the government and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In this regard, the MET has devised through its various projects what we term innovative grant mechanism. These grants are directly given to communities. They aim to increase income generating activities from our natural resource in line with our natural resources management philosophy of sustainable utilization

We view value-addition to our natural resources as critical to our natural resources management approach and community beneficinations. In this regard, the MET intends to intensify and scale-up our community support initiative (CBNRM) as means of local economic development in the broad context of poverty alleviating drive.

Last year alone, the MET through innovative grant mechanism, has disbursed over 5.3 million Namibia dollars directly to communities. In Keetmanshoop, the project beneficiary is the Back-Yard Horticulture Project. As a demonstration site, this project promotes organic vegetable production among unemployed youth. The project is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sports and Culture. In the southern regions, we are working with the Namibia Development Trust (NDT) to assist communities in identifying more community-based projects. I would like to see speedy identification of these

projects and great participation of local people. I am pleased that MET and its partners are supporting the operationalization of the Tourism Camp Site at !Khub !Naub Conservancy as well as facilities to improve the handling and management of wildlife products in the area.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In line with the National Policy of establishing national parks as economic engines for rural development, conservancies and community forests located adjacent to these parks are seeing major benefits from biodiversity conservation in these areas. This is particularly true in Caprivi, Kavango, Kunene and Karas Regions with twenty-two tourism concessions, mainly joint venture initiatives for camps, lodges and activities such as game drives, being signed with communities and conservancies in 2009 in these areas. It is the Ministry's aim to develop Sperrgebiet National Park to add to the economic and social development in the Karas region.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The theme of this year is aimed at enabling us to have a specific focus at a time, but that does not mean in the course of the year, we have to overlook the general responsibility of taking care of the environment. For example the crucial issue of waste management. Every day of our lives, we are producing waste, be it at the household or at intutionall levels. Namibia, Windhoek in particular is known as

one of the cleanest cities in the world, thanks to the residents of Windhoek that, they are all managing their waste in the right manner to the point that littering is not acceptable. I want all of us in our individual capacity to answer the question how I may contribute to keeping my environment clean. I want all the answers to be yes, I am contributing because I don't litter around, no plastics, tins, bottles and alike in my surroundings. Let all of us make the slogan "Keep Namibia clean" a reality. I am aware water is a challenge in Namibia but where possible let us plant trees and make the desert green.

I am aware that, despite concerted national and global commitments and efforts to protect the environment and our biodiversity heritage, the variety of life on Earth continues to decline at an unprecedented rate. Biodiversity loss is moving ecological systems ever closer to a tipping point beyond which they will no longer be able to fulfill their vital functions. But it is not late to start to save our planet.

If the world continue destroying the biodiversity, communities everywhere will reap the negative consequences, but the poorest people and the most vulnerable countries will suffer most. Seventy per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas, and depend directly on biodiversity for their daily sustenance and income.

I believe that we have reached the deadline, for us to refocus our attention to combat these challenges both at national and international levels. We should envision a new goal and direction for biodiversity conservation for development in

Namibia, ahead of the Nagoya Biodiversity **Summit in October this year. At Nagoya, the world is expected to come out with an international region on Access and Benefit Sharing. That means, countries most of which are in developing countries including Namibia may allow access to our biodiversity, but they must have benefit to it when developed countries use those biodiversity for medicinal, cosmetics and others.** Our vision of biodiversity is to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from its use. It must also recognize the close links between our natural capital and our development objectives, a point reflected in the theme for this year's UN World Environment Day.

In this International Year of Biodiversity, the world population especially the well to do have to reflect on the root causes of biodiversity decline and take action to arrest it. There is a need to adjust policies and mind-sets to reflect the true value and meaning in life through how much one can help to restore the planet rather than how much one earn, how large one's houses are, or how many vehicles one own. Let us inculcate a 'culture of sustainability' into our modern society. Let us revitalize and transform our traditional systems, religious values, business models and educational paradigms to ensure that future generation live as we did or better.

Last year I had an honour to launch the Karas friend of the park. At that occasion, I was made to understand that, the friends of the park is a group of individuals

who are ready to volunteer their time to work with the community in preservation of our biodiversity. I want to once again applaud the friends of the park and I hope your activities are going on well. One major concern was some people who came to our parks and take some of our plants in particular valuable plants for unknown reasons. At this stage, I want to appeal to all Namibia, please don't give information on the value of our plants to people when you are not sure why they are want such information. That is our traditional knowledge that needs to be preserved to the benefit of the whole nation. I am aware there may be people who may need information for research purposes, in that case such a person must present you with a research permit from a government institution.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am happy to see that a number of children have participated in various activities that started on the 02 June, in celebrating the World Environment Day 2010. These activities which included clean-up campaigns, tree planting, environment related poems, art & poster presentations, debates, drama and cultural performances will help all of us in developing a sense of environmental responsibility, which is so essential in our every day life. I congratulate individuals and group winners of various Awards this afternoon.

It is the absence of this responsibility which is causing problems on our streets, residential areas, market places and other public places. This leaves you all - responsible citizens of tomorrow, with a great burden to shoulder. But I am

confident that you have the capacity not merely of shouldering this burden but also influencing people much older than you in following environmental discipline.

I would like to thank and congratulate the organizers for hosting the environmental talks on the theme “Biodiversity Conservation for Development” last night. We need such platforms to spread awareness among our communities which will eventually lead to betterment of their lives and better understanding of the delicate web of life that exists on this only planet known to sustain life. It is indeed a pleasure for all of us to be celebrating the World Environment Day this year in this Great Karas Region.

Finally, let all of us commit ourselves to follow the path of sustainable development in earnest.

**I THANK YOU**