

**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM**



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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**African Regional Consultations on ABS**

**04 MARCH 2010**

**Safari Hotel**

***Check on Delivery***

## **Director of Ceremonies**

Invited guest,

Distinguished delegates,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you all to Namibia. I realise that some of you were here for the meeting of core-negotiators that Namibia hosted last year in October in preparations for the round of negotiations that took place in Montreal. Once again you are well come and feel at home.

I am fully aware that, there is a difficult but not impossible task ahead of you over the next three days. You have a responsibility – to prepare for Africa’s participation in the next meeting of the ABS working group in Cali, Colombia. The urgency of using all available time and resources to plan and prepare ourselves as Africans for the negotiations cannot be over-emphasised.

As a Continent, Africa has to remain consistent in our demand for a strong and legally binding international regime on ABS that also includes biological resources, derivatives and products, that recognizes and rewards the traditional knowledge of local and indigenous communities, thereby creating a strong incentive for the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity.

For that reason, the African Group must continue to participate actively and constructively in the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and

Benefit Sharing. I have no doubt on you as African negotiators to use your knowledge and skills so that together with the other negotiating groups the process of negotiating the International Regime on ABS, will bring desirable result in Nagoya, Japan later this year.

I urge you to also think and plan ahead, even beyond the adoption of the International Regime, in particular its implementation. We need a practical, workable International Regime, on ABS – one that unlocks the socio-economic development potential of our biological diversity and allows us to diversify our economies towards “green industries” that will create jobs, alleviate poverty and allow us to achieve economic growth while we protect and conserve our precious biological diversity.

The road thus far has not been an easy one. We have seen many challenges and constraints that kept us from moving towards the realisation of the third objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), i.e. fair equitable benefit-sharing, and through that assuring the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

There is a North-South divide around the issue of ABS and also many assumptions and views that have developed over the years that needs to be considered seriously.

It is crucial that we look at the issues to be discussed and agreed upon during the last remaining meeting of the Working Group on ABS through the eyes of innovation, common understanding and, mutual comprise.

We need to find a way unhindered by our political assumptions and the constituent believes that we have developed over the years as a result of our interactions in the Convention processess. We may also be required to engage in free and frank talk about our problems and challenges.

I am fully aware that any negotiation is a proses of give and take however, one has to be aware of your bottom line, and these are the issues that you have to identify. Your work is made easy as all the negotiating blocks have now put their positions on the table albeit is represented by the bracketed parts of the document. Together with our negotiating partners, a way has to be found to clean the document.

The Regime is important for Africa, even more so than for the other regions. It will therefore be important for us as Africans to start identifying those among our negotiating partners who are close to our position. We need to build alliances and we need to build bridges. It may be easier to draw lines in the sand and stand immovably behind them, but that is not what we need: we need an international regime that helps us to create true win-win partnerships for development and conservation. We thus have the burden to move beyond fixed positions and to begin identifying areas of convergence.

There are a number of important issues that you will have to focus on during the next few days, but I would like to point out a few. We need to find a way to address our concern regarding the use of Biological Resources, Derivatives and products.

The other issues are access versus compliance, genetic resources versus biological resources, disclosure versus non-disclosure, a broad scope versus a narrow scope, an umbrella regime versus a hollow regime, sectoral approach versus a single regime. These are important issues and I believe that if you can find a way around dealing with them effectively, in Nagoya, we will all come out celebrating.

I believe all of you are familiar with the consolidated African position to that end do not waste time to go back to issues already agreed. The time is limited and the work to be done is much. Remember time is a non-renewable resources. Use the time that you have wisely, work dilligently and avoid long protracted discussions, the time for this is long past, now is the time for informed decisions and strategic planning.

It is important therefore that you all endeavor over the next three days to think outside the box, to be original and innovative in your thoughts, to give birth to a land mark process that will put the International Regime on the way to its effective conclusion and implementation. Think about whether what you are proposing or adopting is workerable and realistic, make sense in the real world. What are the implications for national and international implementation? We don't just want a regime for the sake of regime, we want a regime that is workable, that is implementable and that is effective.

Namibia will continue to play her part in this process. We do so as we believe Africa deserves to benefit from its biological diversity that we conserve. In Namibia we have strong conservation programmes as represented by protected areas that covers up 14% of our land surface. We also have conservancies whereby local people in rural

areas have agreed to take care of our biodiversity and utilize it sustainably. To that end they must benefit from genetical resources.

Next week, the African Ministers will meet to consider the outcome of your deliberations, we would like to have your advise as our experts with regard to the issues that we will be expected to address in Nagoya.

Finally allow me to thank the Danish Government for its generous support to this meeting as well as the ABS Capacity Development Initiative for Africa and its many donors and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for co-organising it.

I look forward to the out come of your deliberations over the next few days.

I thank you.