

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

Hon. Pohamba Shifeta
Minister of Environment and Tourism

**On the Occasion of the Official Launch of the Khomas
Hochland Hiking Trail in Windhoek Green Belt Landscape
Conservation Area**

Düsterbrook Guest Farm

12 June 2015

Director of Ceremonies

Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme, His Excellency Musinga Bandora

Governor of Khomas Region, Honorable Laura McLeod-Katjirua

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Mr. Simeon N. Negumbo

Environmental Commissioner, Mr. Teofilus Nghitila

Members from different Protected Landscape Conservation Areas

Representatives of the Private Sector

Staff members from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Esteemed members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pride that I am here today to open the Khomas Hochland Hiking Trail, which is an initiative of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism through Protected Landscape Conservation Areas Project, known in short as the NAM-PLACE Project. The NAM-PLACE Project has been operational since 2011 and is supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme and implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objective of this specific Project is to ensure that Protected Landscape Conservation Areas are established and that land uses in areas adjacent to existing Protected Areas are compatible with biodiversity conservation objectives.

This includes the establishment of ecological corridors to sustain the viability of wildlife populations.

NAM-PLACE is a critical project in support of our ambitious tourism goal under NDP4 for Namibia to be the most competitive tourism destination in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2017. It is further helping us to diversify our tourism products and to increase the benefits from the fast-growing tourism sector to our local communities and farmers.

Not only is the project contributing to the achievement of our 4th National Development Plan, but it is also at the forefront of implementing our National Policy on Protected Areas' Neighbours and Resident Communities that was developed in 2013 to foster improved collaboration in the management of our national parks.

The Government alone cannot conserve biodiversity in isolation, and each of the NAM-PLACE landscapes has adopted the principle of working together. Neighbours and different stakeholders are communicating with one another, and management plans that encourage and promote compatible land uses are now in place for each landscape. This paves the way for joint law enforcement, fire management and joint marketing for tourism opportunities.

This collaboration is especially important during this time when we are experiencing increases in wildlife crime. For the country to succeed in the fight against wildlife crime, we must ensure the best possible collaboration between park residents and neighbours, landscapes, land users, communities, non-governmental organizations, park officials and law enforcement agencies.

We also know that ecological systems are not necessarily aligned with the boundaries of our national parks. You and I may look on the map and point out where the park borders are, however, elephants, rhinos, ants, birds in the Waterberg Plateau Park or vultures in the Namib Naukluft Park do not know where the park borders are. Since wild animals do not know where these borders are, it is therefore essential to manage wildlife and associated ecological systems at landscape level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The place where we are standing now is one of five landscape conservation areas established through the NAM-PLACE project. In addition to the Windhoek Green Belt, we also have the Mudumu Landscape Conservation Area in the north-east, the Greater Waterberg Conservation Area in central Namibia and the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib and Greater Fish River Canyon landscape Conservation Areas in the south of the country.

At each of these sites, I could show how we have lifted conservation barriers and addressed eminent threats to habitat and species loss at a landscape level approach, which is also helping us to have greater resilience to variability and seasonality aspects that are inevitable due to climate change.

For example, here in the Windhoek Green Belt Landscape Conservation Area, the project has supported stakeholders with improving wildlife protection through the construction of a security fence on the eastern boundary of the landscape; upgrading of a road through the landscape to enhance fire management; innovative approaches to controlling bush encroachment; research on predators; and installation of two-way radio system for improved communication among stakeholders.

And today we are officially launching the Khomas Hochland Hiking Trail. The establishment of this trail is an important new product for tourism in Namibia. The 95km trail over 6 days joins five private farms within the landscape and gives an opportunity to residents of Windhoek to enjoy adventure through hiking, which is within easy reach of your homes. The trail is designed in such a way that less adventurous hikers, who are not ready to undertake the entire trail, can hike the shorter trails over a day or a weekend.

Although the trail has the potential to be a success due to its proximity to Windhoek, it is critical that it is well marketed and that high standards are kept. The trail is also seen as test before one can tackle other more famous trails such as the Fish River Canyon Hiking Trail in /Ai-//Ais Hot Spring Game Park in Southern Namibia.

Director of Ceremonies

Before I conclude, allow me to extend our appreciation to the GEF for their continued support to conservation efforts in Namibia. We will continue to seek funding from GEF to implement national environmental projects that contribute to our overall national priorities as outlined in our development framework of Vision 2030 and National Development Plans. Our planning process to utilize the approximately US\$13 million available to Namibia under the GEF 6 funding cycle is currently at an advanced stage, and I assure you all that these resources will continue to be used to catalyze innovation and best practices at the national level and in line with our national priorities.

In addition, I would like to thank UNDP-Windhoek Office for their continued support for conservation efforts here in Namibia. I would especially like to recognize the UNDP approach, which promotes strong national ownership and the enhancement of Namibian capacity to manage, coordinate and implement environmental initiatives. This approach is a cornerstone for Namibia's long-term sustainability, as national ownership is a true reflection of development.

Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is now my honour to officially declare the Khomas Hochland Hiking Trail officially open.

I thank you.