



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

Welcoming Address by Honourable Uahekua Herunga,

Minister of Environment and Tourism

**At the Opening of the Container of the REI Donation to
Namibia's Community Game Guards**

Wilderness Safari offices, Windhoek

15 January 2014

10h00

Director of Ceremonies
Esteemed Invited Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my distinct honour and privilege to extend to you a warm welcome at the opening – literally the “opening” - of the container full of Community Game Guard Equipment donated by Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) International. I recognise that many of you have taken time out of your busy schedules to be part of this auspicious event and I thank you for being here.

Please allow me the opportunity to give a brief background on REI and the donation of the Community Game Guard equipment.

REI is the largest outdoor retailer in the United States. They have a travel company, REI Adventures which sells Namibian itineraries, including trips to Namibia’s communal conservancy tourism sector and our Joint Venture (JV) lodges. In May of last year, the Director of REI Adventures, Ms Cynthia Dunbar, experienced our conservancy tourism product for herself and she was taken with the conservation commitments of our rural residents and conservancy members.

As a direct result of her positive experience, REI selected Namibia and the Conservancy Game Guards in particular, as recipients of their 2013 Sustainable Tourism Award. Through the award, 500 of Namibia’s frontline wildlife guardians, our Community Game Guards, will receive bundles of REI gear

including sleeping bags, backpacks, head lamps, hats, pocket knives, socks, a t-shirt, lip balm, sun screen and a water bottle.

The container we are about to unveil, contains equipment valued at approximately One Million Namibian dollars (US \$100,000).

This contribution was first announced during The Adventure Travel World Summit (ATWS), organized by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA). As everyone gathered here today knows, Namibia hosted 650 ATWS delegates in October last year and, if I may say myself, Namibia organized a spectacular event. I am told delegates voted ATWS 2013 the most successful Summit ever!

In his opening remarks, the ATTA president Shannon Stowell took the podium to answer the question: “Why Namibia?”

He said, “The ATWS is held annually in key places around the world to promote responsible and sustainable tourism. For the first time, ATTA chose Africa as its gathering spot.”

“Imagine the world in 50 years’ time” he said, “imagine the loss of species, habitat and culture.” He continued by saying that: “Namibia has the opportunity to become an example to the world as an unspoiled destination. The Summit will place Namibia on the world tourism map, and we are here to affect how tourism works in the future.”

This past Sunday, the New York Times, the largest circulation newspaper in the United States, rated Namibia as No. 6 among the world's "Places to Go" in 2014! Namibia's hosting of the Adventure Travel World Summit made such a fantastic placement in such an important publication possible.

Our message during the Summit rang loud and clear on the pages of the New York Times. Please allow me to quote the article directly:

"Namibia's communal conservancy movement, which pairs sustainable tourism with rural community outreach, has been a much-heralded success: In 2013, the country's 79 conservancies received the prestigious Gift to the Earth Award from the World Wildlife Fund, and the stunning Namib Sand Sea Desert joined Unesco's World Heritage list. Options abound for travelers who want to help the effort, including the Desert Rhino Camp, which Wilderness Safaris runs in partnership with the Save the Rhino Trust; the camp directly supports the conservancy, which has reversed dwindling rhino populations. In 2014, Wilderness Safaris also plans to open the Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp, on the Hoanib River in the north. Namibia's Tourism Board is introducing three self-drive routes in 2014 to point visitors towards less-visited parts of the country".

These are the types of achievements, the types of messages that make our destination unique and attract travelers to our shores: our conservancy program and conservation commitment.

The community game guards have protected the iconic wildlife of Namibia for over 20 years. With minimal equipment, they have made Namibia an inspiring destination and success story in Africa's struggle against poaching. The Namibian Government and its people are grateful to REI Adventures for this incredible gift and for helping the game guards to be more effective as Namibia's frontline protectors.

I thank you.