



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

**STATEMENT BY HON. POHAMB A SHIFETA, MP
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM**

**ON THE LAUNCH OF THE ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK FENCE
CONSTRUCTION AND FRIENDS OF THE PARKS
PROGRAMME**

22 February 2020, Onanke, Etosha National Park

Director of Proceedings, Mr. Teofilus Nghitila, Executive Director of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism,

Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism, Hon. Bernadette Maria Jagger
Honourable Governors present,

Honourable Regional and Local Authority Councillors present,

Distinguished Traditional Leaders present,

Members of the Namibian Police Force and Namibia Defence Force,

Staff members of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and other Ministries present,

Conservancies and community representatives,

Farmers present,

Members of the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations,

Members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you all here in the Etosha National Park for the launch of these two initiatives on the Etosha boundary fence construction and Friends of the Parks Programme.

Our world-renowned national parks are one of the key tourism attractions in Namibia.

These parks are home to some of our most iconic species and offer fascinating habitats and routes for our tourists to explore.

Where we stand today is one of the oldest and greatest National Parks in Africa and is Namibia's number one tourist destination.

Etosha National Park has so much to offer.

Regular sightings of many iconic species are certainly seen here such as elephants, rhinos, lion, leopard, zebra, giraffe, roan, sable and many other species can be seen almost everywhere in the park.

It is also truly a bird's paradise, with the Etosha pan being part of the park and a Ramsar Wetland Site of International Importance.

For more than 100 years, the Etosha National Park has provided a vast sanctuary for wildlife.

Its protective borders have allowed conservationists to implement plans that have helped resident wildlife flourish and other initiatives that have drawn elephants, lions and other creatures deemed too dangerous or destructive to co-exist on neighbouring farms back into the park.

The Etosha pan has provided refuge for scores of greater and lesser flamingos to breed during the wet season.

I agree with those who say Etosha is magical. From sunrise to long past sunset, the plains and waterholes are places of wonder, drama and diversity.

Let us therefore seize the opportunity to make this park and the experiences it offers even better.

As a Ministry, we recognize that the need to upgrade the infrastructure of our national parks has been greater to ensure that we continue to attract increasing tourists to these parks and the broader country.

We need to ensure that the roads, fencing, accommodation facilities, staff housing, signage, viewing points and ablution facilities in our national parks are of the highest standard possible.

And we need to ensure that a holistic approach to conservation and development leads to a win-win situation for people, biodiversity and tourism.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Coming to the main business of today, the boundary of the Etosha National Park fence is an extremely long perimeter boundary, totalling eight hundred and twenty four (824) kilometers fence and passing through the Oshikoto, Oshana, Omusati and Kunene Regions.

The boundary fence consists of three types of fences: 1) Stock proof fence (1,2m without netting wire); 2) Game proof fence (2,4m with netting wire), 3) Section of 14 km (1,6m) consisting mainly of cable fence.

The current fence has deteriorated to such an extent that in some areas the fence does not exist.

This situation has caused livestock to be grazing in the park and human wildlife conflict incidents are being experienced with communities and farmers living around the park.

Over the past five years, only one hundred and eighteen (118) kilometers of the fence have been upgraded and seven hundred and twelve (712) kilometers remain to be completed.

With the current annual budgetary allocation for the fence upgrade, completion of the upgrade of the fence will take another ten years or more.

This will have severe negative implications as wildlife and livestock diseases will occur, poaching and human wildlife conflict incidences will increase, and general risk to our wildlife protection and species conservation will be heightened.

Furthermore the risk of livestock diseases as a result of cattle grazing in the park with wild animals will be increased.

This could have far reaching economic implications to the country's beef industry and could potentially put export of beef to European, USA, China and other export markets in jeopardy.

In view of the above, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism has decided to take the approach of business unusual to the upgrade and repair of the Etosha National Park fence.

We have decided to deploy staff members of the Ministry to upgrade and construct the fence instead of using private companies or contractors.

We have identified the need to cut out the middle man and are doing precisely that.

Manpower from neighbouring conservancies and farmers will also be used to supplement the efforts of our staff.

Other volunteer organizations will also be welcome to come on board, and this will be done in a more coordinated manner to prevent possible disturbance to wildlife and tourism activities in the park.

Ladies and Gentlemen

If we were to continue using private companies or contractors to construct the Game Proof Fence at Etosha National Park, it is estimated that it would cost in excess of seven hundred thousand Namibia dollars (N\$700,000) per kilometre. For the seven hundred and twelve (712) kilometres still remaining, this project would therefore cost the government an estimated amount of five hundred million (N\$500,000,000).

Through the use of our staff members and other assistants and volunteers, it is estimated that we will spend less than ten million Namibia dollars (N\$10 000,000) over the next three years to undertake this work.

This will cover the costs of additional materials such as poles and wires as well as other operational costs such as camping allowances and protective clothing.

A three year action plan has been developed and approved by Cabinet to help us conduct this activity in a more coordinated manner and at an accelerated speed.

Director of proceedings,
Ladies and gentlemen

During this period of construction of the fence, we will try our utmost best to ensure that staff members involved in the construction and maintenance are well looked after in terms of their immediate and necessary needs which include camping allowance and protective clothing.

It is our duty as a Ministry to do so. I urge all staff members involved to remain committed and operate within the provisions of the Action Plan as appropriate. I equally urge the operational management of the ministry to ensure that the day to day needs of staff members involved in the construction and maintenance of our fence are addressed as fast as reasonably possible.

Officials from the Ministry head office, the Director of Wildlife and National Parks in particular, will visit the project every second month if not monthly, to conduct inspections on progress of implementation and quality of work, and he will practically join the staff members in the construction. Now and then the the Minister, Deputy Minister, Executive Director and the entire Top Management of the Ministry will also do the same.

A committee to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of construction and upgrading of the fence has also been established and will be chaired by the Executive Director himself and deputised by the Director of Wildlife and National Parks.

Other members of the committee include the Director of Planning and Technical Services, the Deputy of Wildlife and Support Services, the Deputy Director for Etosha National Park, the Chief Control Warden for Etosha National Park, the Control Works Inspector for Etosha National Park and the Chief Engineering Technician at the Directorate of Planning and Technical Services.

Director of ceremonies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are also here to launch “The Friends of Parks Programme”. This is a programme which encourages donors, the private sector and other stakeholders to get involved and support the development and management of Namibia’s National Parks and other conservation areas in the spirit of good will and through a coordinated and structured approach.

This programme will support the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in developing, expanding, managing and promoting a system of sustainable national parks and other conservation areas that represents biodiversity, tourism and heritage assets, through innovation and best practice for the just and equitable benefit of current and future generations.

Our vision is also to create a world class volunteer programme operating as an integral partner to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's National Parks Programme in support of our strategic objectives.

The Friends of the Parks programme will add value to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism programme through volunteer activities by individuals, groups and organizations that will make available their time and resources to perform work on projects and activities in National Parks and other conservation areas, as identified and approved by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Fundraising shall take place at a national level as facilitated by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism through the National Steering Committee that is still to be appointed.

Facilitation for fundraising will also be done at a national project level specific to the project and at a regional level specific to the region or park.

We trust that stakeholders will join us in making this programme a reality.

Please be a friend to a National Park so that they continue to play their rightful role in preserving our most treasured species and habitats.

I thank you.