

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM

Commemoration of the World Wetlands Day and World Water Day

Statement by the Honourable Minister of Environment,
Forestry and Tourism

Hon. Pohamba Shifeta, MP

10H00

14.03.2024

Honourable Calle Schlettwein, Minister of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform,

Hon. Marius Sheya, Governor of Kunene Region,

Hon. Hendrick Gaobaeb, Chairperson of Kunene regional council, Serfontein constituency,

Hon. Sebastian !Gobs, Regional Councillor of Khorixas constituency,

Honourable Western Muharukua, Regional Councilor – Opuwo rural Constituency,

Major of Opuwo town, represented by CEO,

Ms. Ndiyakupi Nghituwamata, Executive Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform,

Ms. Delly Mutota, United Nations Resident Representative for Namibia,

Mr. Hieronymus !Goraseb, Head of Business for the Northwest Unit at Namwater,

Dr Jane Olwoch, Executive Director of SASSCAL,

Representatives of government offices, ministries and agencies,

Representatives of civil society organisations,

Representatives of traditional authorities,

Teachers, learners and students from various schools and institutions of high learning,

Esteemed invited guests,

Members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here with you this morning to participate in the commemoration of the joint World Wetlands Day and World Water Day. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism is mandated through the Constitution to maintain ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia, and sustainable utilization of living natural resources for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future.

Wetlands are one of such important ecological systems that we have to conserve for the benefit of all Namibians. It is therefore important for the Ministry to be present at this occasion to raise public awareness about the importance of Wetlands.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Namibia is party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and has listed five such wetlands covering an area of 676,564 hectares, since becoming party to this international agreement in 1995.

Ramsar Convention was created to prevent further loss of wetlands at global level primarily as the habitat of wetland dependent bird species, and other natural resources.

Over the years, the mandate of the Ramsar Convention has evolved to that of promoting wetlands as important and unique ecosystems that requires sound management for the benefit of biodiversity and human livelihoods.

Every year on 02 February we join the global community of 172 contracting parties in celebrating the World Wetlands Day. This year, the day is celebrated under the theme “**Wetlands and Human-wellbeing**”.

Here at home in Namibia, we celebrate World Wetlands Day jointly with World Water Day every year to raise awareness about the importance of water to our livelihoods as a Nation.

Namibia is the most arid country south of the Sahara Desert, and has highly variable rainfall patterns which are further influenced by global warming and climate change, making every drop of water and wetlands a very important aspect of our lives.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Globally our wetlands are in jeopardy. We are losing wetlands three times faster than we are losing our forests, and more than 80% of the wetlands have disappeared since the 1700s. The trend is accelerating even further since the Ramsar Convention to protected wetlands was signed, and since then at least 35% of the wetlands have been lost.

The main driving force leading to the degradation and loss of wetlands are the human activities and climate change. The continuing loss and degradation of wetlands impact negatively on our human livelihoods and wellbeing as the resources which the wetlands provide for our benefit are being lost.

Wetlands are also important for us in Namibia, especially for the communities living in the arid and desert-like environments of regions such as Kunene.

Wetlands offer important ecosystems services such as clean water for our livestock and wildlife, and food resources and clean air that we need for healthy lifestyles while in some instances wetlands also provide us with medicinal plants. Wetlands are not just important sources of food and other resources and economic activities but are now increasingly being recognized as important for our mental health and wellbeing. Despite all the great benefits they provide to our society, our wetlands in Namibia are also threatened and are at risk of being degraded.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am glad that this event is taking place in Opuwo in Kunene Region. As you all know, Kunene Region has experienced prolonged drought since 2012 with only one or two good rainy seasons in between. The drought has negatively impacted on the available water resources and wetlands.

We have seen increasing rates of boreholes either drying up or water tables lowering below the levels at which abstraction is no longer possible.

This has resulted in increased conflict between wild animals such as elephants and local communities in the same period. The human-wildlife conflict has also impacted negatively on the livelihoods of local communities. We have also seen competition for access to naturally occurring water sources such as fountains, increasing between

communities and the remaining wildlife in the area. The prolonged drought has therefore created conservation and humanitarian challenges which I believe could be overcome if we work together.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, realizing the importance of addressing the conflict experienced between local communities and wildlife over scarce water resources, has invested heavily in the creation of elephant-friendly water points, and conversion of diesel engines to solar powered units to ensure that local communities do not carry the cost of providing water to elephants. This has been done in some selected human-elephant conflict areas.

Honourable Minister Schletwein, I am also pleased that the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform has embarked on a programme to rehabilitate water-points in some areas while ensuring that such water-points and infrastructure is protected against elephant damages. It is my desire that our two ministries could collaborate in the areas of water provision for local communities as well for the wildlife.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I further recognize the cultural and traditional values played by the natural wetlands such as springs in this region. Historically, the natural springs shaped the history and the relationship between men and the environment,

as well as the relationship between men and wildlife. These historical and cultural values ensured that the wetlands were looked after and were treated as sacred and important resources. I believe that we can build on those traditions to continue to look after our wetlands occurring in this arid landscape.

I call upon all traditional authorities, regional and local government officials to help promote the culture of wetland conservation, not just here in Kunene but all over Namibia. Concerted efforts at local level will ensure that our wetlands are protected and continue to provide much needed ecosystem services to our society and the environment alike.

In conclusion, I would like to express my happiness with the fact that school-going children and teachers are actively involved in these awareness raising campaigns concerning our wetlands and water resources. It is important that we transfer the knowledge on water conservation and wetland protection to our children early in their lives with the hope that they would continue to care for these resources in their adult life.

I also wish to commend and call upon the organisers to continue to involve children in these very important activities that will ensure continuous preservation of our wetlands for future generations.

I thank you!!