



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE ALPHEUS G.
!NARUSEB, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, WATER AND FORESTRY
AT THE COMMEMORATION OF WORLD WETLANDS DAY,
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS AND WORLD WATER DAY
2019**

ON FRIDAY, 15 MARCH 2019

**AT
NAMWATER OFFICE, OANOB DAM, REHOBOTH**

Director of Ceremonies;

- Honourable, Esme Isaack, Governor of the Hardap Region
- Honourable Bernadette Maria Jagger, Deputy Minister – Environment and Tourism
- Honourable Laurena Christ, Rehoboth West Councilor and other Regional and Town Councilors present
- Ambassador Christian-Mathias Schlaga, Germany Ambassador to the Republic of Namibia
- Mr. Moussa-Elkadhum Djaffar, United Nations Representative (UNESCO Head of Office)
- Ms Nathalie Goagos, MURD Representative to Rehoboth Town Council
- Mr. Joseph Hailwa, Acting Deputy Executive Director, DWAF
- Mr. Ernest de Waal, Manager –Infrastructure, Town Planning and Technical Services, Rehoboth Town Council
- Mr. Benedict Libanda, CEO, Environmental Investment Fund
- Mr. Abraham Nehemia , Chief Executive Officer- NamWater
- Representative of Community Forests
- Other senior government officials present;
- Representatives from cooperating partners and our sponsors;
- Captains of Industries;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. It is my distinct honour to address you on the occasion of commemorating three important international days, namely:
 - a. **World wetlands Day,**
 - b. **International Day of Forests and the**
 - c. **World Water Day.**
2. These three events are celebrated annually in countries all over the world.
3. As in the past, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry together with its collaborating partners has decided to commemorate these important days jointly to create public awareness on the importance of wetlands, forests and water to humankind. Your distinguished presence at this event, is therefore highly appreciated as it is a clear testimony of the importance you attach to wetlands, water and forestry issues.
4. This year's commemoration is held under the single theme of "Climate change affects wetlands, forests, water and us – Leave No One Behind". The theme is chosen to create awareness about the effects of climate change on Namibia's wetlands, forests and water resources and security of supply, to highlight the challenges facing the country in improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. The statement, "**the world without water is a lifeless world**", alludes to the fact that lack of water means no future and no life anywhere in the world including Namibia. For us, who live in such an arid country, the meaning of water scarcity is well known because of the water shortages and extreme droughts which we periodically experience. That is the

situation we are in this year. Water, the blue gold, as sometimes referred to, is the global common good that connects and moves all lives on earth. Without water our wetlands, forests and vegetation are under threat.

6. World Wetlands Day, International Day of Forests and World Water Day 2019 mark an important moment for Namibia as well as the international community at large. It is a moment when we jointly take important steps to address wetlands, forests and water issues to accelerate the move towards solutions based on sound scientific knowledge and cultural understanding to protect our resources during these extreme climatic conditions.
7. As we look at the theme of “Wetlands and Climate Change” for World Wetlands Day 2019, there is a need for recognising the importance of wetlands for humankind, particularly their relevance towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and in impeding the pressure of climate change on wetlands.
8. Wetlands, which include rivers, pans, lakes, iishana, floodplains, dams and shallow sea waters, provide us with water, protect us from floods, droughts and other disasters. They provide food and livelihoods to our people, they support rich biodiversity, and they store more carbon than any other ecosystem. Yet we fail to recognise the value of our wetlands and indeed fail to protect them and instead allow them to degrade.
9. The loss of wetlands results in immeasurable negative impacts on the quality and availability of water, food security and biodiversity to

mention but a few. Today we are sitting at Oanob dam; one of the most important wetlands in this region. It provides us with drinking water, water for our industries, we fish from it and use it for recreation and tourism.

10. Most of the time we don't protect it. The sewage from the houses built around the dam can spill in it if we are not diligent. The oil from the speed boats can spill in it if we are not careful. For each of us to be able to enjoy the services the wetlands provide, we must take care that our activities do not jeopardise the integrity of this wetland. When we neglect our ecosystems, we make it harder for the environment to provide the much needed goods and services for human and economic activities.

11. Similarly, ladies and gentlemen, the International Day of Forests is dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of all types of forests and trees to our economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Forests and trees store carbon, which helps mitigate the impacts of climate change. The network of woodlands, groups of trees and individual trees perform a huge range of functions such as regulating climate; storing carbon; removing air pollutants; reducing the risk of flooding; assisting in food, energy and water security; and improving the physical and mental health of citizens. International Day of Forests this year is commemorated under the theme "**Forests and Education**" - **Learn to love forests**.

12. Namibia is a very dry country and with the low rainfall we are experiencing, we are all called upon to join hands and look after the forests and trees. We are encouraged to increase our efforts in managing our woody resources while protecting them. The increasing loss of trees

not only impacts on livelihoods and human settlement patterns, but results in those essential ecosystem processes and services provided by forested areas being compromised. There is evidence of an overall gradual decline in the area of our forests in Namibia, due to, amongst others, conversion of forests into agricultural land; unsustainable harvesting of timber and fuel wood; unsound land management practices; bush encroachment; wild fires; and changes in demography.

13. In direct support of the tree-planting initiative, the Ministry is and will continue to support public members to participate in tree planting programmes. In order to achieve the objectives of this progressive programme, the Ministry through the Directorate of Forestry supported by the international community, provides specialist advice and other support services including infrastructural development to communities. In this regard, Namibia's commitment to the protection and sustainable utilization of forests is unquestionable.

14. As much as the Ministry promotes the sustainable utilization of forest resources including timber, there are still a lot of groups of people who continue to cut down our trees without the necessary and required permits. The Ministry is taking all necessary steps to ensure that such people are brought to book and that their practice stops.

15. As part of the Government commitment to forest conservation, today we will witness the launch of eleven (11) newly gazetted community forests. The management committees of these Community Forests are therefore urged to fully participate in the management and protection of the forests in their respective areas.

16. Equally important, ladies and gentlemen, the theme for World Water Day 2019 is “**Leave No One Behind**”. The theme calls for accelerated actions to provide safe drinking water, improved sanitation and reduce water related disasters. Approximately 1.8 billion people around the world lack access to clean and safe drinking water leaving them at the risk of contracting water-borne diseases e.g. cholera, typhoid, hepatitis and dysentery.

17. The drought that Namibia experienced during the last four years is a reminder that no one should be left behind with regards to ensuring access to portable and safe water. Over the past years, the Namibian government and its stakeholders invested significantly in efforts aimed at addressing the issue of access to safe drinking water for all. However, more still needs to be done to improve the general access of people to water and sanitation services particularly in the informal settlements and rural areas.

18. I trust that this event and your presence reflects your commitment towards addressing water related challenges in the country and to support the HHP’s clarion call of “No one should be left out”. Therefore, in line with the theme for this year’s World Water Day “We should **“Leave No One Behind”** as we strive towards water security in Namibia.

19. As we face yet another season of rainfall uncertainty and seemingly heading into another difficult drought as the rain has so far been very elusive and erratic than ever, we need to redouble our efforts to find lasting innovative ideas that look at ‘green’ infrastructure such as drip irrigation and harmonize it with ‘grey’ infrastructure which employs use

of reclaimed water for different purposes, to promote water use efficiency at all levels.

20. Director of Ceremony, Ladies and gentlemen; more than ever, we need to embrace the three (Rs):

Reduce our water usage,

Re-use our used water, and;

Recycle our used water

For, freshwater is becoming scarcer.

21. I urge all actors from our government to non-governmental organizations, from the private sector to every citizen, resident and visitor, to continue supporting and taking part in moving the vital agenda of wetlands, forests and water conservation forward.

“Protect our Wetlands, Learn to love forests and Be water wise. Our water, Our future, our Namibia!”

I thank you all for your attention.