



**UNITED NATIONS
NAMIBIA**



Statement by

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UNESCO Representative to Namibia***

for

***The Joint Commemoration of World Wetlands
Day, International Day of Forests and World
Water Day***

at

**Oanob Dam
Rehoboth, Hardap Region
Namibia**

15 March 2019

- Director of Ceremonies,
- Hon Alpheus G. !Naruseb, Minister, MAWF
- Hon Bernadette Maria Jagger, Deputy Minister, Environment and Tourism
- Hon Esmie Sophia Isaaks, Governor, Hardap Region
- H.E. Amb. Christian-Mathias Schlaga, German Ambassador to the Republic of Namibia
- Mr. Abraham Nehemia, CEO, NamWater
- Mr. Benedict Lubinda, CEO, Environmental Investment Fund
- Mr. Theofilus Nghitila, Executive Director, MET and Global Environmental Fund Focal Person to Namibia
- Mr. Ernest de Waal, Manager Infrastructure, Town Planning and Technical Services - Rehoboth Town Council
- Mr. Joseph Hailwa, Acting Deputy Executive Director, MAWF
- Ms Ndina Nashipili, LOC Chairperson
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations;
- Distinguished invited guests and development partners;
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations, the Private Sector and Academia;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Morning!

It is with great honour that I deliver remarks on behalf of the UN System in Namibia. The UN is pleased to be here with you at the joint commemoration of World Wetlands Day, International Day of Forests and World Water Day.

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the 2nd of February as World Wetlands Day, the 21st as the International Day of Forests and the 22nd of March as World Water Day. Today's joint commemoration celebrates all of these important observances and is being celebrated under the themes "Wetlands and Climate Change", "Forests and Education" and "Leaving No One Behind".

Today themes remind us of the importance of raising awareness at all levels of the importance of achieving sustainable management of our environment and biodiversity conservation, including through education. A healthy environment means healthy, resilient communities and prosperous economies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our environment is changing at an unprecedented rate and the impacts of climate change are global. For example, we are seeing changes in weather patterns which threaten food production as well as rising sea levels that increase the risk of flooding.

Although greenhouse gases occur naturally and are essential to trap some of the sun's warmth to make Earth liveable for humans, a century and a half of industrialization, which includes burning fossil fuels and clearing forests and trees, has driven up quantities of greenhouse

gases in the atmosphere. This has resulted in too much heat being trapped, which has had a large impact on our environment.

Namibia is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change and thus it is of the utmost importance that we look towards innovation to address challenges we are seeing and to build resilience.

- It is one of the driest countries south of the Sahara, with average temperatures getting hotter¹.
- It is highly dependent on climate change-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, livestock management and fishing². The agriculture sector remains central to the lives of the majority of the population – by directly or indirectly supporting over 70 percent of the population³.
- It ranked 132nd out of 180 countries in the provision of environmental health for the Environmental Performance Index (EPI)⁴.

Today's commemoration is a reminder that we must protect our environment, including our wetlands, forests and water sources, as these are sources of livelihoods and are key for our ecosystem and economy to operate. At the same time, wetlands and forests absorb carbon from the atmosphere and aid in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namibia has demonstrated leadership when it comes to awareness and response to climate change and protecting the environment. Through policies and frameworks such as the Pollution Control and Waste Management Policy, the National Climate Strategy and Action Plan and the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5)⁵.

Namibia has also committed to and localised the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which accords primacy to people, prosperity and planet. This agenda strives to “ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources”.

Several of the goals are directly related to today's joint commemoration, including SDG 6 'Clean Water', SDG 13 'Climate Action', SDG 14 'Life Below Water', SDG 15 'Life on Land', and SDG 17 'Partnerships'.

To achieve these Goals, we must work together to ensure that our planet, precious resources and biodiversity are protected. We must also ensure that we all can sustainably benefit from the resources that Namibia has to offer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

¹ World Bank. Climate Change Knowledge Portal. Namibia. <https://bit.ly/2svHapv> - Average temperatures between 1901-1930 and 1991-2015 increased from 24.6°C to 24.9°C in January and 14°C to 14.6°C in July.

² Ministry of Environment and Tourism. 2011. 'National Policy on Climate Change for Namibia'. <https://bit.ly/2Hj5TBU>

³ FAO. 'Namibia at a Glance'. <https://bit.ly/2LXyaSq>

⁴ Environmental Performance Index. 2018. <https://bit.ly/2swe9di>

⁵ Through the Environmental Sustainability Pillar. <https://bit.ly/2J54On4>

The United Nations in Namibia has recommitted to achieving these Goals and protecting the environment through its partnership framework with the Government of the Republic of Namibia, the UNPAF 2019-2023.

This framework is fully aligned to the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5), and through the Environmental Sustainability Pillar, the UN aims to build the resilience of vulnerable populations in disaster prone and biodiversity sensitive areas so that no one is left behind. We are also supporting the Government to ensure that these populations benefit from natural resources management and are resilient in the face of shocks and climate change effects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Several of the Agencies operating in Namibia also have specific projects aimed at protecting our wetlands, forests and water, these include:

- UNDP, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), is implementing the Sustainable Management of Namibia's Forested Lands (NAFOLA) Project, with funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The project aims to reduce pressure on forest resources by facilitating the gazettement of community forests⁶, and increasing the capacity for the uptake of improved agriculture, livestock and forestry management practices in these areas. In total, 43 community forests have been gazetted across the country⁷.
- One of FAO's key missions in Namibia is to support the Government in making agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable and reduce rural poverty⁸.
- UNESCO is working the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) through its regional initiative - the International Hydrological Programme (IHP). NUST is currently hosting the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Water Research from Climate Adaptation in Arid Environments, and is playing, "a key role in providing research on how government, institutions and communities can sustainably manage and ensure easier access to clean water and sanitation".⁹

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, on behalf of the UN System in Namibia, let me assure you of our commitment to be the 'Partner of Choice' in protecting the beautiful Land of the Brave.

However, we need everyone on board. To protect our planet, we must all work together, and I encourage each and every one of you to commit to taking 'climate action' today – doing something to save our environment – whether that means planting a tree, using a reusable water bottle and shopping bag, saving water, or buying local products, the options are endless.

⁶ The collective use and management of natural resources in rural areas by a group of people in a communal setting, also known as community-based natural resource management, has become an important tool in promoting environmental and ecological sustainability as well as improving community access to ecosystem services.

⁷ To date, nine community forests were gazetted through the support of the NAFOLA Project, Otshiku-shilthilonde, Omundaungilo, Otjituuo, Omuramba ua Mbinda, Epukiro, Eiseb, Ojombinde, African Wild Dog, and Ehi-rovipuka, with a total area of approximately 4 056,336 ha. With the additional two community forests gazetted through MAWF, this brings the total to 43 community forests gazetted

⁸ FAO in Namibia. <http://www.fao.org/namibia/fao-in-namibia/en/>

⁹ Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). "NUST HOSTS FIRST UNESCO SCIENCE CHAIR IN NAMIBIA". Accessed online: <https://www.nust.na/?q=news/nust-hosts-first-unesco-science-chair-namibia>

At the end of the day if we do not work in partnership to protect our forests, wetlands and water sources, there will be severe consequences for biodiversity, human health and food security. Together, we can protect the environment to ensure that future generations can live in a healthy, clean and sustainable Namibia.

I thank you.