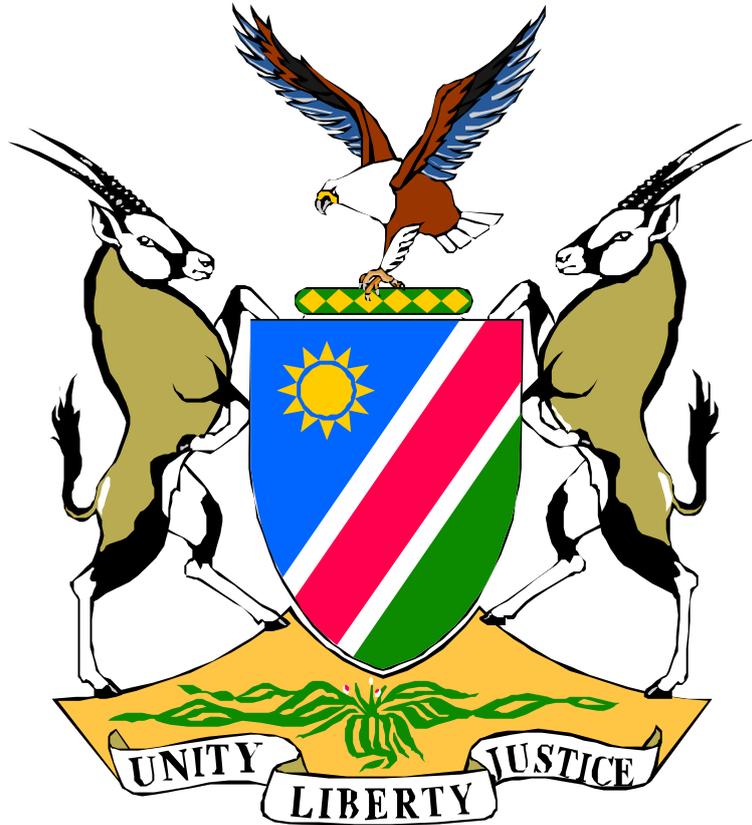


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY

DR HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA,

**PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
NAMIBIA TOURISM BOARD**

JUNE 2011

WINDHOEK

Check Against Delivery

**Director of Ceremonies,
Members of Media,
Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I feel proud to be part of this gathering tonight in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Namibian Tourism Board (NTB). The tourism sector in Namibia has grown dramatically over the last 21 years, especially over the last two years it has proven and demonstrated its resilience to external shocks such as the international economic crisis. Despite the difficulties caused by the global economic crisis, the tourism sector continued to show some growth. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) declared that tourism has showed a higher level of resilience to economic and other crises, compared to many other industries.

The Namibian tourism sector has seen a steady growth from around 200 000 arrivals in 1992 to almost 1 million tourist by 2009.

In Namibia, it has become evident over the years that tourism is a major contributor to job creation and economic growth.

Tourism revenue is derived from wilderness safaris, excellent resorts, tour operators, hunting, car rentals, hiking, adventure, archeological visits, cultural tours, guided 4x4 trails and community based tourism activities.

These income generating activities clearly indicate the multiplier effect of tourism. For this reason, our Government has identified tourism as an engine for rural development, community empowerment and as a strategy for poverty alleviation.

Over the years since independence, our government has been steadily working developing the necessary legal and policy framework to facilitate and allow the tourism sector to flourish. In 1996, when our Government decided to pass legislation that would enable the establishment of communal conservancies, only few, of the stakeholders, if any understood that it would prove such a successful rural development and community empowerment tool by combining community based natural resource management and tourism.

This initiative was later strengthened with the implementation of the Policy on Wildlife Concessions on State Land in 2007. This Policy allows conservancies neighboring national parks to benefit directly from the parks through the awarding of tourism and wildlife concessions. It also applies to communities living inside parks.

This policy is proactive and innovatively addresses significant challenges for rural communities living next to the parks, such as unemployment and poverty, loss of human life, stock losses or crop damage from wild animals, and a reduction of livelihood options.

At the same time, this policy makes our internationally recognized national park system more viable by creating wildlife-friendly management next to our parks.

In 2008 the National Policy on Tourism was developed and adopted by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. That policy document contains sections dealing with tourism information management, regional and national cooperation and planning, the administration of tourism, and importantly the respective roles and responsibilities of the private and public sector.

Director of Ceremonies,

Some of the priority areas that need attention include the need to grow and increase domestic tourism. Tourism is highly seasonal and domestic tourism has the potential to address the dip in revenues created by the seasonality of the sector. Domestic tourism will also facilitate awareness for Namibians on the beauty and character of our country. It is saddening to note that there are still Namibians who may never have felt the cold Atlantic waters at our coast.

On the other extreme we, also have Namibians who have never experienced our Namib Desert, the Kalahari, or our mountains such as the Spitzkoppe, Brandberg or the experience of witnessing an elephant or giraffe in its natural environment. Therefore, it is imperative to aggressively market Namibia to Namibians.

Director Ceremonies,

We are here to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Namibia Tourism Board which was established ten years ago in 2000.

The NTB is a statutory body responsible for achieving broadly defined marketing goals set by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in the areas of research, promotion, product development, and quality and service standards.

I am pleased to note that the Namibia Tourism Board also has the mandate to set and enforce quality standards for the tourism industry and to collect levy payments from the tourism industry.

The Namibia Tourism Board has grown into a visible and pro-active institution that is today a unique role player in the Namibian tourism industry. I am informed that the NTB now has representation abroad, especially in our key consumer markets namely Europe and South-Africa and that it has recently expanded into Asia by establishing offices in China.

The North America market is now being targeted through the development of an interactive website with assistance by the Millennium Challenge Account.

Director of Ceremonies,

Our political history deprived many Namibians of an opportunity to have not ventured into the tourism sector. It is, therefore, imperative that government, through its Ministries and agencies, facilitate the mainstreaming of previously disadvantaged Namibians into the tourism sector. In that light it is important that NTB, together with the relevant stakeholders, work out a framework which collectively shall support BEE SME mainstreaming into the tourism industry through transformation process ranging from funding, marketing support, mentoring and coaching.

I must state that Namibia's tourism product offering has essentially been nature based. Our unique landscapes and wilderness areas and the fauna and flora which they support have been a strong attraction over the years and still remain a corner stone of our tourism sector.

It is, however, also essential that we diversify our product offering to other aspects of our country such as community-based and cultural tourism as well as exposing other regions less visited in Namibia to ensure regional spread in our marketing initiatives and through that, ensuring regional spread of benefits. I believe NTB has a big role to play in this regard.

Our tourism statistics continue to indicate that Europe and South-Africa continues to be our main source of customers. As we diversify our product offering, there is also the need to open up and grow new and emerging markets whilst at the same time sustaining current markets. This will allow us to focus on a wider spread of the tourism market segments instead of only focusing on the current low volume high yield approach which may not support some product facilities such as our community-based rest camps, backpackers and Bed & Breakfast establishments.

Director of Ceremonies,

I am informed that some tourism operators, both established and emerging, have been engaged in activities that may harm Namibia's image as the preferred tourism destination. There are reports of operators who receive funds from guests but deliver sub-standard service.

This is not to be encouraged and must be aggressively addressed by all stakeholders. These practices tend to taint the whole sector and negatively affect the ability of other entrepreneurs to market themselves. It is, therefore, imperative that the NTB steps up its efforts to robustly regulate the tourism industry to deliver quality service to visitors in order to ensure improved experience of our visitors.

Namibia has been over the years in need of a comprehensive tourism development and growth strategy to help direct and steer the whole sector to a common goal and vision. I am aware that there has been a number of regional tourism development plans prepared in the earlier years after our independence. These were however not combined to strategically place the tourism sector on a path of sustained growth and development.

I am also informed that since independence, there have been no clear economic (financial and non-financial) incentives set forth in the tourism sector to attract potential investors to Namibia. As it is the case in the agricultural, manufacturing and mining sectors in our country.

Equally, there was also no comprehensive list of existing as well as potential future tourism investment opportunities in Namibia that could serve as a guide to investors interested in the Namibian tourism sector.

I am, therefore, pleased with the initiative from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to develop a tourism growth and development strategy as well as a tourism investment profile and promotion strategy. I hope that these strategies will support the development, promotion and marketing of responsible and sustainable tourism, and encourage strong partnerships between the public and private sectors. It must also determine the character of the type of tourism we wish to develop and promote in Namibia that is based on the notion of high quality low impact tourism taking into account the unique features of our tourism sub-sectors.

The tourism investment strategy will help us to capitalize on the investment climate and opportunities provided by Namibia's political stability, safe environment as well as our comparative and competitive frame-conditions such as our well-developed roads infrastructure and telecommunication network.

Director of Ceremonies,

Tourism is a cross-cutting sector and therefore regardless of what sector we are, we do have the power to influence the climate for tourism in the country. I, therefore, urge all of you today, especially the captains of the tourism industry both in the public and private sectors to join hands and assist the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to successfully finalize these two strategies.

I also urged all stakeholders to address without delay the lack of relevant and crucial skills and expertise in the tourism sector, especially in the hospitality sub-sector. It is unacceptable that for 21 years we have not been able to train young men and women to acquire these necessary skills and expertise required in our tourism industry. Let us put our hands together as an industry to address this crucial element for the growth of our tourism sector.

In this context, the challenge is on the Namibia Tourism Board, Air Namibia, Namibia Wildlife Resorts, the Private Sector, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration, the Ministry of Safety and Security, the Polytechnic of Namibia, the University of Namibia, the various tourism associations and the general public to work together in ensuring that skills shortage in this important sector of our economy is address and make Namibia the preferred tourism destination not only in the region but globally.

I wish the NTB success for the years ahead, may you grow from strength to strength.

I thank you.