

**SPEECH BY HON. DR. NOAH WEKESA, EGH,
MP, MINISTER FOR FORESTRY AND
WILDLIFE ON 'THE CYCLE WITH RHINO'
EVENT ON 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2009 AT
LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK.**

Hon. Josephat Nanok, Assistant Minister, Forestry and Wildlife,
M. A. M. Wa-Mwachai, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Forestry
and Wildlife,
Mr. Hazell Thompson, Director, African Division of Birdlife
International,
Dr. Julius Kipng'etich, Director, Kenya Wildlife Service,
Mr. Richard Etemesi, Chief Executive Officer, Standard Chartered
Bank,

It is my great pleasure to join you all at this year's *Cycle with the Rhino* event. From the mood and activities that have been going on since we started early this morning, the event lived up to its promise to be spectacular to the participants, who enjoyed the beautiful scenery, wildlife and watched birds as they cycled. This is truly a unique fundraising initiative that started in 2003, and has grown over the years.

Lake Nakuru National Park is one of our premier in the country and should be jealously preserved for posterity. To mitigate human-wildlife conflict, the park fence was constructed in 1986. This fence has served its years, and needs rehabilitation and maintenance. It costs KShs.1.4 Million to construct one kilometer of the fence, complete with mesh and loops to stop monkeys and baboons from jumping over to the community areas and safeguard loss of food.

I am aware that KWS collaborates with partners in Nakuru, including hoteliers, the business community through the Nakuru Business Association and the Nakuru Municipal Council to implement various projects. Some of the projects carried out include beautification and cleaning up of Nakuru town, especially in areas next to the Park; and assistance to the schools by provision of books, desks and building materials.

All these serve to provide raise awareness for communities adjacent to the park and educate them about the importance of co-existing with our wildlife. In this regard, I wish to congratulate members of the Park Action Committee for their effort which I must say is not in vain.

This morning we also branded this park with the Important Bird Area (IBA) logo. This is a strategy for highlighting the diversity of the attractions available to visitors in the country, beyond the big five. It is also aimed at raising awareness in order to reduce stress on birds.

Kenya is one of the leading countries in Africa with regard to the biodiversity and number of bird species. We host Africa's Secretariat for BirdLife International, out of the global recognition of the work we are doing to conserve birds. Already, a National Bird Checklist, sponsored by KWS, has been produced by the Bird Committee of Nature Kenya. This was officially launched this morning as well.

Other checklists for each of the 62 Important Bird Areas in the country are in the process of being produced.

All these efforts will serve to market Kenya as a bird watching destination such as Rwanda, Seychelles and South Africa, which are also working very hard to maintain their ecosystems. As a key strategy in Vision 2030, we are on course towards diversification of our tourist circuits by opening up the Western and Northern circuits.

We are looking at the IBA sites on the shores of Lake Victoria, Cherangani Hills, Lake Turkana and others, all of which should be marketed vigorously to open up these areas for development. It will also draw our attention to the need to conserve birds, which are threatened by the changing land use practices. For example, the numbers of the lesser flamingoes have highly reduced due to Mau problem.

We encourage Kenyans to visit our parks and enjoy the serene environment as they relax in our campsites, picnic sites or the lodges. Lake Nakuru National Park is especially scenic, as you have all seen.

In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this function for inviting me. I also thank the sponsors especially Park Action Committee, Safaricom, Farmparts, James Finlay (K) Ltd, WWF - the Conservation Organization and the Platinum Sponsors, the Standard Chartered Bank. Thank you all cyclists for your participation.

Thank you