

**Speech by Hon Dr. Noah Wekesa, EGH, MP Minister for Forestry and Wildlife,
On the occasion of Fourth Annual Conservation Heroes Day, at KWS
Headquarters on Lang'ata Road, Nairobi, December 2008.**

**All protocols observed
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

**I wish to request that we all stand and observe a moment of silence in honour
of our departed colleagues, friends, fathers and heroes.**

It gives me great pleasure to join you today during this important day of recognizing our fallen heroes. Today's event marks the fourth annual Conservation Heroes Day. And I must state at this juncture, that indeed, today is an important day in the annual calendar of events for KWS and the entire conservation fraternity.

For a long time in the history of the wildlife service, wanton poaching and uncontrolled acts of banditry summarized Kenya's wildlife protection. However, it is gratifying that today the story is different since security has seen significant improvements for wildlife and its habitats, as well as for visitors and communities that live adjacent to conservation areas.

It is in the process of accomplishing its mandate of conserving and managing the country's wildlife for posterity, that KWS has lost 42 valiant and dedicated men since the late 1980s. And their loss has not been one in vain; they have lost their lives for the country, the region and the world at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am aware of the enormous challenge of managing and conserving the country's natural resources. A case in point is the Mau Forest Complex which has taken a complex political twist, yet Tanzania and even far off countries like Egypt depend on its waters for livelihoods. Our handling of this matter is therefore crucial, not just to our own people down stream, but also for those in the far off countries.

Another challenge faced is the inadequate number of rangers and wardens. The two Tsavos, for example, are twice the size of Israel, and yet we only have a

handful of rangers and wardens to provide security to that expansive wildlife haven. It is in these same parks where we get the biggest challenges of poaching, bandit attacks and the illegal bush meat trade. It is in this area where a large number of our fallen heroes lost their lives.

Yet, future generations will never forgive us if we allow our precious wildlife heritage to be irreparably damaged or disappear altogether. These parks are just but examples to show the enormous challenges that we face. our resolve to accomplish the task ahead of us can never be allowed to wane or falter at any given time. If that were to happen, our departed heroes would have died in vain.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I call upon our serving rangers to keep their focus and remember the time-honoured words of General Douglas Mac Arthur: **Duty, Honour, and Country.** What you are doing is not just for your own glorification; nor is it just a job that provides food and other basic needs to your families. More important, it is for the country and indeed, the world at large.

I wish to assure the families, friends and colleagues of the departed heroes, that my ministry is doing all it can to give the KWS Board of Trustees and its management all the required support. This is to ensure that our rangers are well trained and equipped so that the parks and conservation areas are well managed, and that the reason for which our departed ones gave their lives, is not lost.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we focus towards achieving Vision 2030 in which tourism is a leading sector in achieving the goals of the vision, we aim to be among the ten ling-haul tourist destinations globally. Therefore, we must join hands is fighting all the challenges that threaten our wildlife conservation and tourism.

As we all know, poaching is one of the biggest threats, and recent incidents across the globe draw our attention to the challenges to our wildlife heritage. For example, the recent Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) agreement allowing the sale of ivory stock piles by the southern African countries of South Africa, Namibia ,Botswana and Zimbabwe to Japan and China, and seems to have created greater demand for ivory by poachers.

Despite the global economic meltdown, the government is doing all it can to ensure Kenya can meet the challenges of a rapidly expanding tourism market when the world recovers from this crunch.

The construction of infrastructure, especially roads and airstrips, will serve to increase the number of visitors to our parks. We must, therefore, ensure that the wildlife and its habitats are safeguarded at all times.

KWS must continue undertaking its mandate without fear or favour of any reprisals. We must continue being vigilant and courageous in undertaking our roles, for that is the only way that we will overcome the scourge of poaching and illegal bush meat. We are grateful that no ranger has died in the line of duty this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me to finish by quoting Martin Luther King, who once said: **“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”**.

Our fallen heroes stood fast in their moment of challenge; we must not disappoint them, or the generations to come by shying from the tough duty that continues to beset our path – we must stand and be counted. We must honour their memory for posterity

Long live conservation!

Long live the ideals for which our departed heroes died!

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to now take this opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous 2009.