

Welcoming Address By the Minister For Natural Resources and Tourism Honourable Mrs Zakia Hamdani Meghji (Mp)

Source: Journal of East African Natural History, 87(1) : 3

Published By: Nature Kenya/East African Natural History Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.2982/0012-8317\(1998\)87\[3:WABTMF\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.2982/0012-8317(1998)87[3:WABTMF]2.0.CO;2)

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**WELCOMING ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER
FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND TOURISM
HONOURABLE MRS ZAKIA HAMDANI MEGHJI (MP)**

Honourable Vice President, first and foremost let me thank you most sincerely for accepting our invitation extended to you to officiate the opening of this International Conference on Biodiversity of the Eastern Arc Mountains. Despite your very busy schedule, you have managed to set aside time to grace our conference. We feel very privileged and proud that you are here with us today. Honourable Vice President, your presence here today is a clear indication of the commitment of the Government of Tanzania to nature conservation.

Honourable Vice President, before welcoming you to perform the function, allow me to say a few words on the conference and on one of the policies that guide nature conservation in Tanzania.

The Eastern Arc Mountains command both local and global importance and historically the first serious plea for their conservation was raised by a Swedish couple in the late 1960s. This was followed by a low-key conference in Tanga in the late 1970s. This, therefore, is the first International Conference on Biodiversity of Eastern Arc Mountains. This conference has been made possible through support by the Governments of Finland, Norway, Denmark and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. I wish to pay tribute to them all for the generous support.

Honourable Vice President, my Ministry has in the course of this year revised and reviewed the National Forest Policy. The policy is now at an advanced stage of ratification by relevant organs. In the proposed policy, biodiversity conservation has been given high prominence and will be included in management plans of all protected and production natural and plantation forests. Further to this, forests with high biodiversity value may be declared nature reserves. Even before the ratification of the policy, my Ministry in May 1997 established the Amani Nature Forest Reserve through Government Notices Nos. 151 and 152. This nature reserve is in the East Usambara Mountains, which are part of the Eastern Arc Mountains. Honourable Vice President, the establishment of this nature Forest Reserve was supported by the Government of Finland. Allow me, Honourable Vice President, to recognise this support. The Government of Finland also supports forestry research through TAFORI.

The proposed forest policy further stipulates that local communities and other stakeholders will be involved in forest management and thus biodiversity conservation through joint forest management agreements. My Ministry views this approach as appropriate and important for the success of conservation.

The Eastern Arc Mountains could moreover become a component of World Heritage held in trust by Tanzania. Other designated sites include the famous Ngorongoro Crater and Kilimanjaro. Their conservation calls for international co-operation. This is the implied spirit in this International Conference on the Biodiversity of the Eastern Arc Mountains.

With these few remarks, I have the honour and pleasure to welcome you, Honourable Vice President, to officially open our conference.