

Opening Speech by His Excellency the Vice President of Tanzania, Dr Omar Ali Juma

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OPENING SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF TANZANIA, DR OMAR ALI JUMA

Environment is an issue of growing concern in Tanzania as with a great part of the world. There is a high degree of pollution in both urban centres and rural areas, as manifested in frequent out-breaks of cholera and other water-borne diseases. But there is also massive environmental degradation, which is threatening to turn many regions of our country, including Mwanza, Tabora, Dodoma, Singida and Arusha, into deserts. An estimated 300,000–400,000 hectares of forest is lost every year.

Environmental degradation in rural areas manifests itself in various forms, including rampant tree cutting, traditional farming systems, especially on mountain slopes, and overstocking of livestock. Apart from desertification in some areas, these activities result in landslides and loss of soil fertility. Reduced productivity and rural poverty are the ultimate outcome of this degradation. Unfortunately, this poverty in turn becomes the reason for continued degradation of the environment.

Another environmental problem in Tanzania is encroachment of reserved areas, including National Parks and Game Reserves. This leads not only to deterioration of the biodiversity but also destruction of our tourist attractions, especially our wildlife heritage.

Government strategy for environmental protection and management

The Third Phase Government of President Benjamin Mkapa made environmental management and control a priority agenda and for that reason it is placed under the Vice President's Office for better co-ordination of the multi-sectoral effort. We can broadly classify our Government's strategy into four areas:

1. Policy formulation

The Office of the Vice President has prepared a draft National Environmental Policy which lists the following measures as its prime objectives:

- (a) to ensure sustainable and equitable use of resources for meeting the basic needs of the present and future generations without degrading the environment or risking health or safety;
- (b) to prevent and control degradation of land, water, vegetation and air, which constitute our life support systems;
- (c) to conserve and enhance our natural and man-made heritage, including the biological diversity of the unique ecosystems of Tanzania;
- (d) to improve the condition and productivity of degraded areas, including rural and urban settlements, in order that all Tanzanians may live in safe, healthful, productive and aesthetically pleasing surroundings;
- (e) to raise public awareness and understanding of the essential linkages between environment and development and to promote individual and community participation in environmental action;
- (f) to promote international co-operation on the environment, and expand our participation and contribution to relevant bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and global organisations and programmes, including implementation of conventions.

2. Rehabilitation of affected areas

The Office of the Vice President, through its Department of Environment and the National Environment Management Council is currently in the process of taking stock of all areas affected by environmental degradation and pollution. Immediate action is taken where people's lives and health are in great danger, but the objective is to establish more sustainable measures of rehabilitation and maintenance. Among the measures that are in the pipeline are a review of the laws to make them more effective, establishment of environmental standards and imposition of Environmental Impact Assessments for any proposed economic project in both urban and rural areas.

3. Conservation of natural resources

Tanzania has abundant natural resources, including water and forest resources. These are now facing either depletion or destruction. We are preparing a comprehensive, multi-sectoral programme for preserving these resources. This includes a review of the land tenure system and organisation of information generation towards a comprehensive overview of Tanzania's biodiversity resources, their status and trends, and the costs and benefits of their conservation to provide the basic understanding for the formulation of strategic interventions. Programmes for the conservation and utilisation of biological diversity shall be pursued to prevent and control the causes of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity.

Biodiversity policies, strategies and programmes are only meaningful in relation to other national policies, strategies and programmes. We therefore intend to link our strategies for conservation of biological diversity and sustainable use of biological and genetic resources with other related sectoral and cross-sectoral programmes to ensure uniformity and sustainability.

4. Awareness campaign

The linchpin to all the policies, strategies and programmes we have outlined above is people's awareness on the importance of the environment. The preservation and care of the environment is a matter of life and death for them.

However, it will not be easy to create a culture of environmental consciousness among the people when their environmentally unfriendly activities are often dictated by the prevailing economic conditions. In other words, environmental degradation is closely tied to poverty. A clear case in point is the use of forest products for energy and building construction. An environmental awareness campaign has to be accompanied with promotion of alternative source of energy and building materials.

Significance of the Eastern Arc Mountains

As you are all aware, the Eastern Arc Mountains comprise of eleven separate blocks forming a chain running from the Taita Hills in Southern Kenya through Tanzania. The crescent or arc includes the Pare Mountains, the Usambaras, Nguru, Ukaguru, Rubeho, Ulugurus, Udzungwa and Mahenge.

The importance of these mountains to Tanzania cannot be over-emphasised. Although statistics show that they cover less than 2 % of Tanzania's land surface, they have a large variety of flora and fauna.

The mountains are very crucial to the supply of water and electricity in Tanzania. The Ruvu River, which supplies water to the City of Dar es Salaam and the Mtera Dam, Pangani Falls, Kidatu and Kihansi on which we depend for our hydroelectricity have their sources in these mountains. If we add to these the Wami, Ruaha and Rufiji rivers, all of which originate

from the Eastern Arc Catchment, we shall see the importance of these mountains to Tanzania's agriculture and industry. The forests in these mountains are also important for the supply of timber.

It is for these reasons that our Government attaches great importance to your conference. Your deliberations will bear not only on the preservation of our ecology, but also on our immediate economic endeavours. I therefore sincerely commend and thank the Tanzania Forestry Research Institute, the Departments of Zoology and Botany of the University of Dar es Salaam, the Faculty of Forestry, Sokoine University of Agriculture and TAFORI for organising this international conference. I am convinced that at the end of the five days of deliberation you will come up with very useful recommendations on the preservation of the biodiversity of the Eastern Arc Mountains.

Role of international community

The international community has a big role to play in facilitating Tanzania Government's effort in protecting the environment and conserving our biodiversity. The first contribution they can make is in supporting research on the causes, effects and remedies for environmental pollution and degradation. This research will of course include endangered species, both animals and plants. In this regard let me commend the valuable work done by the Tanzania Forest Research Institute. They need support in capacity building. The co-operation symbolised in this conference encourages me to believe that support will be forthcoming.

Secondly, as I pointed out earlier, the extent of environmental degradation in Tanzania is great. Substantial financial resources are required to arrest the decline. You are all aware of the current economic situation of Tanzania. Despite our good intentions, we are not in a position to meet all our objectives without the support of environmentalists beyond our borders. Also, as I intimated earlier, to ensure people's participation, it is necessary to improve their living standards so that they can be assured of supply of clean water and alternative sources of energy, other than firewood. In other words, efforts towards environmental control must go hand in hand with programmes for poverty alleviation. Education also plays a big role in environmental consciousness. It will, for example, facilitate programmes of agricultural modernisation and elimination of backward practices like over-stocking of livestock as a status symbol.

Let me, at this juncture, avail myself of this opportunity, on behalf of the Government, to whole-heartedly thank the Nordic countries, Finland in particular, for the great support they give to Tanzania in matters of environmental management, especially our programme of afforestation and conservation. We are particularly cognisant of the personal interest and efforts of H.E. Ilary Rantakari, the Ambassador of Finland, in the conservation of Tanzania's biodiversity.

It is obvious that in order to achieve successful conservation of biodiversity in the Eastern Arc Mountains collective action of the international community is required. Our Government is therefore anxiously waiting to receive your suggestions and recommendations so that we can work out a strategy and programme of implementation.