

**SPEECH BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L (JABU) MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE HANS HOHEISEN WILDLIFE RESEARCH STATION AT KRUGER NATIONAL PARK.**

**Wednesday, 25 September 2010**

Programme Director, Mr Celani Dube;

Board Member of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, Ms Gaylene Deiner;

CEO of MTPA, Mr Charles Ndabeni;

CEO of Peace Parks Foundation, Mr Werner Myburgh;

Managing Director of Kruger National Park, Mr Abe Sibiya;

Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria, Professor Jerry Swan;

Funders and sponsors of the research station, Alexander Forbes Foundation, Hoffmann and Turner Foundations;

Inkosi Mnisi "Mvuleni" Phillip Phendulani;

Our esteemed colleagues from Mozambique and South Africa involved in the development of the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier Park;

All other institutions present;

Members of the community;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

*Good Afternoon!*

I am humbled and honoured, for having been afforded this rare opportunity, to witness the opening of this all significant wildlife research station – a sign that both the public and private sector, are equally committed towards conservation of our endangered species and the environment.

We highly appreciate the decision to launch the station during Women's month – a sign that we all agree that women continue to play an immeasurable contribution towards preserving our environment – because of their caring nature. They all agree with American conservationist, Nancy Newhall, who asserts that *“Conservation is humanity caring for the future.”* Women of yester-years contributed significantly towards our liberation struggle; Women of today continue to fight for the conservation of our endangered environment; and I am confident that Women of tomorrow will continue fearlessly, on the footsteps of their predecessors. This is the human nature of Women – they are care-givers, and would even move mountains, if needs be, just to ensure that the interests of future generations are preserved.

As we close Women's month celebrations, may I ask that we dedicate the opening of this research station, to the memory of all those Women, both sung and unsung, who fearlessly fought for our liberation and freedom. As care-givers, we believe that if the responsibility of conservation could be given to Women, they would do just wonders. If being a selfless care-giver is equated to being powerful and fearless, then Women are more powerful and fearless than men. We salute you!

Ladies and gentlemen, when we endorsed our country's new Constitution in 1996, we collectively agreed that *“Everyone has the right to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”*

We therefore believe that the opening of the *Hans Hoheisen Wildlife Research* station, will result in both economic and social benefits for the people of our province, our

country and the SADEC region. This is based on the fact that our mere existence as human beings and animals, depend entirely on the environment.

We are an integral part of the ecosystem, hence even the air we breathe, we owe it to the vegetation around us. The vegetation too, depends on us for its continuing existence since we supply it with carbon dioxide. Since our existence is interdependent, we therefore have a crucial responsibility to ensure that both the animals and our vegetation are protected from becoming extinct. The opening of the research station therefore symbolise our unwavering commitment towards ensuring that we too, continue to exist, side by side with animals and our environment. The station will assist us to research on various species, which are significant to keep the ecosystem balanced.

In fulfilling that responsibility, we are partnering, through the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, with the University of Pretoria and the Peace Parks Foundation to pay particular focus on the domains of agriculture and conservation within a veterinary context. Both these domains have been identified in the NEPAD and the SADC policy documents as important drivers of regional economic development. **Agriculture** is critical to ensure the provision of sufficient and safe food for local use, which will eventually have spin offs for the export market; whereas **conservation** is critical to ensure the protection of our endangered indigenous fauna and flora, as drivers of eco-tourism and sustenance of bio-diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to start acknowledging and accepting the fact that the health and welfare of life on earth, is fully dependent on the sustainability of its bio-diversity. There are numerous factors that impact on this sustainability and the humankind's continuing access to sufficient ecosystem services. Some of the more critical current influencers are, amongst others:

- The rapidly increasing human population and inter-continental movement of people;

- Movement of animals and their products;
- Pressure on natural resources;
- Competition for land, given the different land-use for subsistence farming and conservation;
- Poverty of the masses;
- Emerging and re-emerging diseases; and
- Global climate change.

Our province is currently equipped with state veterinary offices, as well as two laboratories in Nelspruit and Ermelo. As most of us would know, the most prevalent disease outbreaks in our province are the *foot and mouth*, *tuberculosis*, *brucellosis*, *rabies* and *corridor* diseases. We are very fortunate that the research laboratories in the province, have assisted tremendously in putting drastic control measures to ensure that the spread of these diseases is very minimal, through surveillance programmes, movement control, vaccines, as well as awareness campaigns among communities. This additional research station will therefore relieve the two previously burdened laboratories.

Ladies and gentlemen, the success of the outcomes produced by all the research stations will collectively contribute to the economy of the province, since eco-tourism contributes significantly towards economic growth. Tourists come to the Kruger National Park and other game parks, to experience our treasure in the form of our wildlife, as well as the breath-taking panoramic views of our province.

Our challenge continues to be the protection of communities living close to game parks, especially in the western boundary of Kruger Park, as well as next to many other game reserves. In the rest of Africa, there are often no boundaries between such communities and the wildlife parks. This ultimately results in diseases that

affect human beings, livestock and wildlife. The birth of the *Hans Hoheisen* Wildlife Research Station will thus play an exceedingly vital role in this regard.

Our best researchers from the region, national, and international will be able to utilise their expertise on this facility. Our communities will without doubt, benefit as well, as they themselves and their livelihoods will become the focus of the research and eventual protection against diseases. In addition, the communities and their livestock on the one hand and the province's wildlife as a whole, will benefit from data collated at this station.

The direct outputs of the station are research results. Application of the research is expected to have a direct impact on the way the diseases occur and spread. In that way, the outputs of the station will have a positive and life-saving impact on the affected communities. Furthermore, because of the relationship that this interface contains, it will impact beyond international borders, and thanks to SADC's transfrontier conservation areas, this will all become a reality.

As I close, I take this opportunity to congratulate the MTPA Board under the leadership of Mr Sabelo Mahlalela; its CEO, Mr Charles Ndabeni; the University of Pretoria; the Peace Parks Foundation; the donors and sponsors of this facility and all supporters for continuing to live our dream - a dream towards fulfilling the commitment we made on 08 May 1996, when we adopted our progressive Constitution. During that occasion, we collectively committed to ensure that:

*"Everyone has the right to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development."*

We acknowledge and appreciate your continuing efforts to contribute towards economic growth in our province, which will in turn benefit our people and change their lives for the better.

**Working together we can do more** to speed up economic growth and transform the economy **to create decent work and sustainable livelihood** for the people of Mpumalanga.

In the words of English politician and poet, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, and I quote:

*"To find what you seek in the road of life,  
the best proverb of all is that which says -  
Leave no stone unturned."*

*I thank you!*