



**SPEECH**

**BY**

**HON. DR. NOAH WEKESA,**

**MINISTER FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE**

**DURING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF THE ABERDARE TRUST**

**AT THE ABERDARES NATIONAL PARK**

**ON 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2012.**

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The Rt. Hon. Dr. Raila Odinga, EGH, MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya

Cabinet Colleagues present,

Members of Parliament

Permanent Secretary, Mr. Wa-Mwachai

Mr. Colin Church, Chairman, Rhino Ark Management Committee,

The Chairman, KWS Board of Trustees, Hon. David Mwiraria

The Chairman KFS Board of Directors, Prof. Richard Musangi,

Provincial Commissioner, Mr. Jasper Rugut

Distinguished Guests,

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today is a great day for all of us as we gather here yet again to mark another milestone in our national conservation efforts. The last time we were here is two years ago when H.E. the President accompanied by the Prime Minister commissioned the Aberdare fence.

Our mission today, is to fulfill one of the promises we made. The promise was to develop a legal instrument to anchor our partnership in the management of this fence. That is why we are here today to launch the Aberdare Trust. In one way, this occasion is a celebration of the partnership between our two agencies, the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Forest Service and the

Rhino Ark. The aim of the Trust is to ensure sustainability of the project mainly through generating funds for investment in the maintenance of the fence infrastructure.

I am pleased that this has been fulfilled within a relatively short time. It shows great commitment and a shared vision by the three institutions on what sustainable conservation is all about. We have come a long way from the days when government and the NGOs used to have parallel visions that never seemed to converge at any point. The NGOs seemed to be on the side of the conservationists while the government was perceived to be complicit in undermining conservation efforts.

Many of us are well aware of the many battles that conservationists such as Prof. Wangari Maathai fought with so-called developers and even government functionaries to save Karura forest. Similar struggles were witnessed in other forests across the country.

The lessons that we have learnt out of these struggles is without the goodwill and shared vision between the government, the public, the private sector and the NGOs, conservation of our natural resources would be an uphill task. That is why **Ladies and gentlemen** we are all grateful that in the past ten years, we have achieved a complete transformation in management of our natural resources. Most importantly, we now have in place appropriate laws to protect our forests which are also wildlife habitats.

In particular, the Forest Act 2005 has enabled us to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations and communities to conserve our forests and the results are there for all to see. In the wildlife sector, the Wildlife Bill proposes to raise compensation for injury to person or death, livestock, crops and property damage occasioned by wildlife.

For example, the compensation for death caused by wild animals will reach a new high of one million shillings from the current Ksh. 200,000. What this means is that fencing will become one way for the government to avoid facing prohibitive compensation claims in the era of new constitution. If this is not done, then a huge amount of public funds may be spent in paying compensation claims instead of implementing conservation projects.

My appeal is for all of us to join hands not only in putting similar fences but more importantly in protecting them from vandalism. Indeed vandalism of fences has become a rampant trend that is threatening to reverse the gains made in resolving long standing human-wildlife conflicts.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Since the fence was commissioned, an independent *Environmental, Social and Economic Assessment of the Fencing of the Aberdare Conservation Area* was undertaken last year. The key findings in the report confirm that;

- A 20.6% increase in forest cover between 2005 and 2010

- A 54% decrease in open areas (grassland and cultivation inside the now fenced 2000 km<sup>2</sup> Aberdare Conservation Area)
- A 47 % increase in exotic plantations outside the fenced area.

The report attributes these improvements to the effects of the fence and associated fence management guidelines as well as more assertive policy interventions.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

When I was here in 2010, I proposed the establishment of an arboretum and an educational centre in this place to promote conservation education and eco-tourism. This proposal still stands and that is why today, besides unveiling



the Aberdare Trust, we are also taking this opportunity to launch the establishment of the Arboretum and the Educational Centre.

We envisage such facilities will adopt the young persons' approach to environmental education with programs and exhibitions. The young persons belong to the generation that we will bequeath this country's leadership, once we leave the stage and they should therefore be empowered in environmental matters.

It is also envisaged that once the Centre is established, tourists, nature lovers, youth groups and school children are among regular visitors. I expect it to become a major eco-tourism attraction site.

In conclusion, I want to thank Prime Minister for being steadfast in support of conservation amidst great challenges and political risks. Given the threat posed by climate change, it is the leadership that will stand with environmental conservation that will be on the right side of history.

I also want to appreciate the Rhino Ark team for your good work in wildlife conservation. Equally I want to thank the local community and my team from the Ministry, (KWS and the KFS) for your commitment to this project and organization of this event. Since I cannot mention everyone who has made valuable contributions, let me assure all of you that your various inputs to this project is noted and greatly appreciated.

With those remarks, it is my pleasure to invite the Rt. Hon. Dr. Raila Odinga to give the keynote address and officially launch the Aberdare Trust.

**Thank you!**













































