

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR FORESTRY  
AND WILDLIFE HON. DR. NOAH WEKESA,  
EGH, MP, DURING THE PUBLIC AUCTION OF  
THE LION SCULPTURES MADE IN  
CONJUNCTION WITH THE KENYA WILDLIFE  
SERVICE, BORN FREE FOUNDATION AND  
WILD IN ART, AT KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ON 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2009 FROM 4.00 PM**

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Director of the Kenya Wildlife Service,  
Miss Virginia McKenna,  
Representatives from the Born Free Foundation,  
Members of the Press,  
Friends,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my very great honour to be here this evening on such an auspicious occasion.

The *Pride of Kenya* initiative has clearly ignited the hearts and imaginations of people across Nairobi and beyond. The breadth of support for lion conservation – from the companies, individuals and organisations represented here this evening, and those that have participated far and wide - is a testament to that.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** We find ourselves in a unique position in our precious country. Despite the challenges of the recent drought, ours is such a magnificent environment, it is no wonder that visitors from all four corners of the globe and all walks of life decide to visit us.

It is true to say that we have a natural heritage that we can be immensely proud of, one that is the envy of others and one which, I believe is not matched anywhere else on this planet. But we cannot be complacent! As has been highlighted here already this evening, even in Kenya our wild lions are facing an uncertain future, and therefore need to be conserved and protected.

We have reached a branch in the road for lion conservation and left the branch that would mean we ignore the plight of the lion and allow numbers to continue to decline. It is now evident that we should take the resolute action necessary to prevent illegal killing, mitigate conflict, and secure the survival of sufficient wild animals on which lions rely for their daily survival.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** by taking the correct decisions, we demonstrate that we will do whatever it takes to secure a future for wild lions throughout Kenya, despite the immense challenges that entails.

It means that through the efforts of the Kenya Wildlife Service and others we shall do everything in our power to guarantee the integrity of our protected areas, that we shall work with local communities to resolve the problems posed by living with wild lions, we shall bring the necessary resources to bear to end the illegal bush-meat trade and the unsustainable exploitation of our precious natural resources.

In fact, Kenya Wildlife Service scientists have warned that the country's lion population could be wiped out altogether in the next two decades due to climate change, habitat destruction and conflict with humans. The Lion occupies a special place in Kenyan's livelihood and conservation efforts. Other than being the symbol for national strength, lions are a major attraction for visitors to Kenya.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** by choosing to conserve the lions, it means we are desirous that wild lions not only survive but are also protected in order for them to thrive in our country for generations to come. For these efforts to succeed, my friends and colleagues, we have to work together.

The Born Free Foundation, Kenya Wildlife Service and Wild in Art, through the *Pride of Kenya* initiative, have given us a unique opportunity to join hands, work together, and make a real difference for lions. Being among the so-called Big Five along with elephants, buffaloes, leopards and Rhinos, they are a major tourist attraction in National Parks and Reserves.

*Pride of Kenya*, I believe, is as much about our people as it is about our wildlife.

*Pride of Kenya* has brought people from all walks of life together in common cause. The lion may be the figurehead around which we have gathered but saving the lion is symbolic of a wider and more fundamental issue that demands our attention. The lion relies on the existence of a healthy ecosystem for its survival and so do we.

Without the services that a flourishing natural environment provides, without careful and sustainable stewardship of our forest and plains, our lakes and rivers, our mountains and seas, we threaten not just lions and all other wild creatures, we threaten our own survival.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** *Pride of Kenya* is the wake up call that we need, alerting us to the plight of the “King of the jungle,” but also sending out a message that applies to us all.

Conservation is as much about people as it is about wildlife. We are all in this together!

In Conclusion, may I take this opportunity, to thank the organizers of this event for inviting me. It is my hope that the proceeds of this Auction will immensely support these projects and everyone who has been involved in its success.

I thank you all for attending because this is a demonstration of your support for conservation.

**Thank you and God bless you.**