

ABERDARE ELECTRIC FENCE FINAL POST CELEBRATION – 28 August 2009
Minister's Speech – Draft 1

Salutations

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have made this joyous occasion possible. These include the Rhino Ark, KWS, KFS and all those who participated in the fundraising activities to make the Aberdares Fence a reality. I especially want to thank all the officers who were involved in this project for their hard work over the many years it has taken to complete this fence. And of course, accolades go to the community, without whose support we would never have completed this fence.

Not to be left behind is the Kenya Government, which has endorsed the principle of shared investment by committing Kes. 100 million to the project to date. This principle of 'a shilling for a shilling' will ensure shared fiscal responsibility from both civil society taxpayers and the Treasury.

To bring this project to sustainability under a legally binding statute, the formation of a Trust is going on. Its mandate is to play an active role in the technical and general management of Aberdare's ecosystem.

Ladies and gentlemen

"The Aberdare fence safeguards a forest of 2,000 square kilometres of inestimable importance and value to both nature and man. It is a fantastic achievement in both concept and physical effort.

"But we cannot truly celebrate what has been done without recognizing that the Aberdares is only one of six vital water towers in Kenya, and that the biggest of them all – the Mau – remains in desperate peril. Can we celebrate the life of one child when another is dying? Kenya's future environment is not assured until ALL its forests are safe.

"The Aberdare fence provides the concept and the design. Its completion provides hope. These achievements are considerable, indeed remarkable, but they are not enough.

"The greatest achievement of all for the Aberdare fence and for Kenya as a whole will be if this model is used as a template to save and secure the other major forests. All of them. Most urgently and most significantly, the Mau."

"Do we want the Aberdares to stand as a lone reminder of what the other forests used to look like? Or do we want them all to live and grow, and remember that it was the completion of the Aberdare fence which prompted the action that saved them all from destruction.

“Today we stand at a pivotal moment in history. Is this the day we celebrated doing too little, too late? Or is today the day we realised how much more must be done, how high the priority must be, and how urgent is the timescale?”

“By all means let us celebrate this day, with all our heart. But let us know that we are celebrating the end of one great task, an even greater danger and an historic moment of opportunity are staring us in the face.

“Let today be the end of something big, and the start of something even bigger.”

For twenty years we have fenced the Aberdares. During that 20 years, we have LOST THE MAU. Now that the Aberdares Fence is coming to completion, should we not be looking into the possibility of Rhino Ark moving to restore the MAU in the same way? We shall discuss the possibility of Rhino Ark pledging a percentage of the proceeds from the Rhino Charge to the restoration of the Mau.

And how about the other water towers? How do we ensure their conservation? We must look for lasting solutions. It is all about our lifestyles. It is about the choices we are making in life. It is about the short-sighted nature of how we make our priorities.

Ladies and gentlemen

Mother Nature will never forgive us if we abuse her. And the generations to come will blame us for the destruction we have caused them. For the hardships we are creating for them.

The time to rise up beyond ourselves is now. The time to stand for what is right is now. The time to change our actions is now....while we have the opportunity salvage our environment. We cannot go on talking forever, even when we have tasted the repercussions of our actions!

I want to repeat this:

By all means let us celebrate this day, with all our heart. But let us know that we are celebrating the end of one great task, an even greater danger and an historic moment of opportunity are staring us in the face.

“Let today be the end of something big, and the start of something even bigger.”

Let us do our part!”