



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**Speech by Ambassador Attilio PACIFICI
The Head of Delegation
of the European Union to the Republic of Uganda**

**Commemoration of the UN World Wildlife Day 2019
(Arua district, Uganda, Sunday March 3, 2019)**

Right Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda,
Honourable Minister for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu,
Colleagues Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
The UN Resident Coordinator,
Honourable Members of Parliament present,
The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities
Representatives of other Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government,
The Chairman, LC 5 Arua district,
The Mayor, Arua Municipality,
The Chief Administrative Officer, Arua district,
Civil Society and other actors in wildlife, conservation, biodiversity & environment,
The media,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor to participate to these important celebrations today in Arua and to represent the European Union.

Indeed it gives me a special joy and it makes me proud representing 28 European countries who care a lot about what is being done all over the world to fight for issues core to all people and to our planet.

Today we celebrate the UN World Wildlife Day 2019 focussing on a crucial global theme: **"Life below water: for people and planet"** while at a country level an equally important theme has been adopted: **"Harmonious living between Wildlife and People"**.

Before making remarks on the chosen national theme, I must say few words about the global theme of this year which is about oceans and marine species.

Uganda is blessed by many bodies of water such as the River Nile, the Lake Victoria and many vast swamps, but Uganda is a land locked country and does not have direct access to seas or oceans. We all know this and some probably wonder why we should talk and worry about something which is so far away such as oceans and marine life?

Let me tell you friends, that Uganda, all Ugandans and everyone in the world, should care really a lot about oceans and marine life. We should make an effort to understand their importance and we should

be the fiercest frontline defenders of marine life, seas and oceans fighting alongside those who are already aware of their importance and who care.

We must all know - and we should never forget - that **“Oceans regulate our climate, produce half the oxygen we breathe, provide nourishment for billions people, absorb 30% of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere and absorb most of the heat from climate change.”**

Protecting the oceans and the wildlife species living there is about protecting us and our lives; it is about safeguarding the future of our daughters and sons and securing for them a world in which they can live and thrive after we will be long gone. That is why we must care!

That is why we must all care about every aspect, every fact, every challenge and every species of the world we live in including marine life and oceans even if they are so far away from where we live.

Coming to the national theme of this year I wish to congratulate Uganda, through the Honourable Minister for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu, for once again having chosen a theme which is really core and totally pertinent to the challenges and

the opportunities that Uganda and her people face every day in their relationship with wildlife and environment.

Once again the question is why should we care about wildlife and environment if we have to worry about so many more pressing issues every day? Why should we hesitate to take down few bushes and trees or refrain from killing few animals when the alternative is going to bed on an empty stomach?

Why should we care about preservation and conservation and why should we debate about finding a harmonious living balance between Wildlife and People?

I will try to provide my views hoping to convince some of you.

Unfortunately, Europe for too long has not been a good example. Throughout our history we have dramatically altered and devastated our land trying to domesticate rivers, seas and swamps often for agricultural reasons but more often to exploit natural resources pursuing evil objectives such as wars. It is said that once upon a time a squirrel could cross Spain from north to south, moving from branch to branch of the thousands oak trees that covered the country, without ever touching the ground. This was before Spain built its huge naval fleet, the Invincible Armada. The same is true for many

regions of Italy, France, the UK and so on. So much is gone and so many animals thriving in European woods almost disappeared.

However, in the last 50-60 years we have been working hard to preserve what we had not destroyed, creating reserves and National Parks and supporting the repopulation of wildlife and doing reforestation. In a way in Europe we are lucky because our biodiversity is very limited. The number of species of trees and animals we have is quite limited so doing reforestation with indigenous species, controlling poaching of the few animals we have were not impossible missions.

It is actually working very well now. In fact the forest coverage is increasing in most countries and villages and communities around or inside National Parks are doing pretty well with tourism bringing good revenue and with losses due to predation by an increasing number of predators generally well compensated by Governments.

There are even discussions now to reduce the numbers of predators as their numbers is growing too fast in order to achieve a harmonious living balance between people and wildlife. This is exactly the national theme chosen for this year celebrations in Uganda.

However, there are differences between European countries and Uganda when it comes to biodiversity making the Ugandan mission much more difficult than the European one.

First point, for a biologically incredibly diversified country – such a Uganda – it is virtually impossible to recreate forests and woodlands once they are destroyed and to bring them back as they originally were. Once those forests and woodlands are gone they will be gone for good and with them thousands of species of animals and plants will be gone forever too. This means that all efforts should focus on the strict preservation and conservation of the incredibly beautiful remaining forests, natural reserves and national parks which this country is blessed with. This is precisely what the Ministry and the authorities concerned are doing in Uganda. We fully support their endeavours both morally and with concrete actions as we have been doing for many years. I will come back to that point.

Second point, biodiversity, beautiful landscapes, wildlife and cultural traditions that this country is blessed with can provide prosperity to the country as a whole and even more so to the communities living around those areas. To put it bluntly conservation and preservation of the environment and wildlife, of cultural heritage and traditions means money, big money. The revenues generated by tourism,

which is the single highest foreign exchange earner for Uganda, are significant. A figure often quoted is 1.4 to 1.5 billion dollars per year which is nearly 25% of the total export of Uganda. These are already important figures but there is much more when considering the many economic activities sustaining tourism and certainly there are huge still untapped opportunities out there.

One more point must be well underlined: money generated by environment and wildlife is sustainable and is forever. A National Park will never cease to generate revenue. Unlike an oil field a National Park will never - so to speak – get dry, it will always attract visitors and will bring money as long as it is carefully protected and conserved.

Regarding the Government of Uganda, its obligation vis-a-vis citizens is to profit fully of all opportunities that contribute to make the country prosperous as well as to protect all sources of revenues. It is also Government's responsibility to ensure that local communities benefit in a fair way of the revenues generated by tourism and when possible also that communities are fairly compensated for the losses they incur as a result of their proximity to wildlife. The overall objective is to ensure that communities fully appreciate the advantages of participating to a commendable operation which

protects and conserves the environment and wildlife while generating prosperity for the country.

The role and the responsibilities of communities and individuals in conservation and presentation efforts are very important too. No one goes to a country and pays big money to see roads, power plants or industrial parks. People, visitors, want to see and understand what is unique and typical of a country: museums, old buildings, tiny villages in Europe and pristine landscapes, forests, wildlife and cultural traditions in Africa.

In the case of Africa if lions and elephants are killed, if forests are cut down, if woodlands are transformed into wastelands and if cultural traditions are forgotten what makes Africa unique and special will be gone forever. Many species of animals unique to this land will vanish and a big flow of money creating jobs and businesses will stop.

Environmental protection and wildlife conservation are in the interest of everyone: Central Government, Local Government, authorities, tour companies and hotel entrepreneurs, financial institutions, communities and individuals. Also local authorities, security services, investors and so more have clear interests. They all are key stakeholders bound to cooperate, in their own interest, to find a **“Harmonious living balance between Wildlife and People”**.

Therefore, I appeal to everyone to contribute to find this balance in Uganda and I praise the vision, leadership and determination of the Ministry for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, and of Professor Kamuntu in particular, as well as that of all the authorities operating in the sector.

What you are doing is so important. The EU and its MS have a long standing history in wildlife conservation and environmental protection all over the world including in Uganda. I could provide so many examples of how we are helping but I will not.

It should suffice to say that the European Union and its Member States are with you and will continue to be with you and to support your efforts in every possible way.

Thank you very much to the Arua district community for hosting us

I wish you all a wonderful World Wildlife Day, 2019.