

**SPEECH**

**By**

**H.E THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA  
ON THE OCASSION OF THE WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 2019**

**BOMA GROUNDS, ARUA MUNICIPALITY**

**3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2019**

Honorable Ministers;  
Honorable Members of Parliament;  
Local Government Leadership;  
Development Partners;  
All Members of the Diplomatic Corp;  
Permanent Secretaries, Directors and Commissioners;  
Boards of Trustees and Chief Executives of Agencies;  
Heads of Tourism Private Sector Associations;  
Distinguished members of the Civil Society and Academia;  
Distinguished Invited Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this historic occasion as we commemorate the United Nations World Wildlife Day, 2019. I congratulate all Ugandans and the global community on this occasion where we celebrate our natural and God-given heritage.

As you all know, on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013, the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 3<sup>rd</sup> March of every year as United Nations World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness about the critical need to world's wild fauna and flora.

This event is an opportunity for us to celebrate the many natural endowments of wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness about ecological, economic and social cultural benefits that conservation provides to the people of Uganda and the rest of humanity.

The National theme for this year's celebrations is: **“Harmonious living between Wildlife and People”**. Historically, our fore fathers lived in harmony with nature. We should be striving as humanity to protect and conserve wildlife for our own benefit and that of our children and grandchildren. If we deplete wildlife heritage now,

our grand children will not survive in an environment devoid of nature.

As you may know, Uganda is exceptionally gifted by nature with immense wildlife diversity. Uganda hosts 54% of the World's remaining population of mountain gorillas, 11% of the world's recorded species of birds (50% of Africa's bird species richness), 7.8% of the global mammal diversity (39% of Africa's mammal richness), 19% of Africa's amphibian species richness and 14% of Africa's reptile species richness, 1,249 recorded species of butterflies and 600 species of fish.

This diverse wildlife endowment gives us a natural competitive edge to develop Uganda into a top tourism destination in Africa and globally. You are aware that tourism is now the leading foreign exchange earner for Uganda.

Annual visitor exports stand at US\$ 1.45 billion which accounts for 23.5% of the total exports with a recorded total of 1.5 million international arrivals. Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP stands at Ushs 7.27 trillion amounting to (9.0% of GDP). Tourism sector provides 1.173 million jobs in Uganda accounting for 7.8% of total employment.

For instance, Uganda Wildlife Authority alone employs over 2,000 staff. At a global scale, tourism accounts for 292 million jobs and has now overtaken automobiles and Oil and Gas in global GDP contribution.

In recognition of this potential, the NRM Government prioritized tourism and conservation as a fundamental source of our economic growth in Vision 2040 and National Development Plan II.

It is worth reiterating that Uganda almost lost all its wildlife to state inspired poaching and lawlessness that characterized the political turmoil of 1970s and early 1980s. However, with the restoration of peace and stability and the clear headed NRM visionary leadership, we have been able to restore most of the wildlife populations.

Elephant population has increased from only 2,000 in 1983 to 6,000 today; Mountain Gorillas in Bwindi alone have increased from only 298 in 1993 to now over 400; Buffalos have increased from 25,000 in 1982 to now 36,953; Uganda Kob has increased from 40,000 in 1982 to 77,759 surpassing the post-independence populations of 60,000 Kobs. We have managed to reintroduce Rhinos back to Uganda after getting extinct. The initial population of 8 has multiplied to 24 now.

As Government, we are committed and determined to maintain total peace and security, improving transport and energy infrastructure to spur economic growth among others through tourism and conservation.

We have been able to maintain a network of national parks and other protected areas covering about 10% of the total land surface (25,981.276 Sq km). These include 10 National Parks, 12 Wildlife Reserves, 10 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 5 Community Wildlife Areas. Our total terrestrial protected area coverage now stands at 16% when you factor in Central Forest Reserves under NFA.

The improved wildlife populations continue to attract tourists to Uganda. As you know, visitor arrivals have been steadily growing, moving from 539,000 in 2006 to now 1.5 Million. Correspondingly,

foreign exchange earnings from tourism have been increasing, rising from US\$ 375 Million in 2006 to now US\$ 1.45 Billion.

We have taken several policy and legislation reforms to promote conservation. We have formulated Uganda Wildlife Policy, 2014, Uganda Tourism Policy, 2015 and Uganda Tourism Master Plan. Uganda Wildlife Bill, 2017 revising existing Uganda Wildlife Act 2000 which has now been approved by Parliament. The Bill provides for deterrent penalties for people engaged in wildlife crime relating to endangered species up to maximum sentence of life imprisonment and hefty fines. All these are aimed at enhancing harmonious coexistence between wildlife and people.

We have built capacity of conservation institutions including creation of the Ministry responsible for conservation, strengthening Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Wildlife Education Center, Uganda Tourism Board among others. Government has now established National Wildlife Research and Training Institute to deal with Research and Training issues for conservation.

The Judiciary has established a dedicated court to deal with wildlife crimes and the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecution, the Uganda Police, Uganda Wildlife Authority, the Customs and all law enforcement agencies are now working together to fight wildlife crime.

We are aware that some challenges of poaching, illegal wildlife trade and trafficking, human wildlife conflicts, climate change impact, invasive species, limited ecological research and low awareness still exist but we remain fully committed to addressing these challenges. We need to strengthen the idea of having communities at the forefront of conservation.

Thank you, our conservation partners, for your efforts towards conservation of wildlife in Uganda. We commend the Non-Government Organizations, Academia, Research Institutions, Private Sector and Development Partners engaged in conservation.

In conclusion, I call upon all Ugandans and our conservation partners to continue supporting our efforts to conserve Uganda's wildlife heritage for sustainable development of our country and the world. Let's strive to create harmonious living between wildlife and people.

**I thank you all.**