



REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

**PRESS STATEMENT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY.**

22 May, 2011.

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Biodiversity Office

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HONOURABLE FRANCIS D.C. NHEMA (MP) ON THE INTERNATIONAL BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY DAY COMMEMORATION: 20th MAY, 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed May 22nd of each year as the International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD) to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues nationally, regionally and internationally. On Sunday Zimbabwe joins the whole world in commemorating the International Day for Biological Diversity under the theme **“Forest Biodiversity”**.

This year 2011 is another special year, the United Nations General Assembly has declared it as the **“International Year of Forests”** after the realisation of the importance of forest biodiversity to the livelihoods and well-being of people across the globe. Celebrations, this year provides Zimbabwe with a unique opportunity to raise public awareness on the importance of forests in our lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we can not overemphasis the importance of forests to our livelihoods and well-being. Globally more than 1.6 billion people rely on forests and non-timber forest products for their livelihoods and forests are home to an estimated 300 million people around the world. In Zimbabwe our forests are home to an estimated 150 000 people.

Forest biodiversity sustains human well-being through a multitude of ecosystem services, such as water purification, provision of oxygen, crop pollination, soil formation and retention, nutrient cycling, regulation of climate, spiritual and cultural benefits and provisioning of habitats.

Three quarters of the world's accessible fresh water comes from forested watersheds and two-thirds of the major cities in developing countries have their drinking water purified by forests. Zimbabwe gazetted in excess of 800 000ha of indigenous forests in the Kalahari eco-region for commercial timber exploitation, wildlife habitats and most importantly to provide a forested watershed for rivers such as Gwayi and the mighty Zambezi.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 80% of people in developing countries rely on traditional medicines and up to half of which originate from plants found mainly in our tropical forests. Forest biodiversity is actually the basis of more than 5000 commercial indigenous plant species found in Zimbabwe of which about 500 plant species are known to be of use in traditional medicines.

Ladies and Gentlemen despite the fact that forests are at the heart of our own survival as a people, our forests are fast disappearing because of deforestation, land degradation, tobacco curing, wildfires, illegal logging, mining, population pressure and the large scale conversion of land to agriculture. The rate of deforestation has somewhat slowed down over the past ten years, yet approximately 13 million ha of the world's forests or the equivalent of an area the size of Greece or Nicaragua are lost or degraded annually. In Zimbabwe about 330 000ha of forests are lost annually to deforestation and other causes. As we go into winter Ladies and Gentlemen, let us not use the winter chills as an excuse to cut down more trees for our energy requirements instead lets use wood energy serving stoves like the tsotso stoves and solar cookers.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in a bid to reduce deforestation, my Ministry has promulgated the following regulations: the Tobacco Wood Energy Regulations, Plantation Timber Industry Regulations, Firewood Trading Regulations and the Movement of Timber Regulations. Once these are gazetted, they will go a long way in reducing rates of deforestation in Zimbabwe.

I suggest that we change our habits, for example, instead of cakes at birthdays why don't we plant trees so that we celebrate life achievements with life. Let us plant trees at funerals so that even our dead will enjoy the shade that will be provided by our trees. At weddings, why don't we plant trees as we celebrate the union of two people?. This will include even during our marriage anniversaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we had set a target of planting 5 000 000 trees across Zimbabwe by the end of 2010/11 planting season and I am glad to announce that we, as a nation, have surpassed that target and to date a total of 5 292 000 trees have been planted. I am now challenging everyone to go out in full force to plant even more trees as we re-green our Zimbabwe. Let our target this year be even more ambitious. Once we have planted the trees please let us not forget to care for them because doing so would defeat the whole purpose of trying to green Zimbabwe because the trees will not survive.

Trees are life let us join hands and celebrate life. Forests are our mother earth's living treasure.

I thank you,