



**SPEECH BY THE HON. MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENT
HON. SAM CHEPTORIS**

CHIEF GUEST

AT THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATIONS

5TH JUNE 2020

Theme: NATURE IS SPEAKING, LISTEN

***The Hon. Ministers and members of Parliament,
You Excellencies the Ambassadors,
Representative of the Development Partners,
Development Partners,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.***

It gives me great pleasure to once again stand before you as we commemorate the 2020 World Environment Day, under the Global theme: "Time for Nature" and National Theme: "**Nature is speaking listen**".

This year's World Environment Day is commemorated under very unique circumstances. In our traditional style WED would have brought together thousands of Ugandans to show case their commitment to the environment and demonstrate their achievements and efforts towards achieving environmental sanity.



This has not been possible due to yet another nature and environment related challenge, "COVID 19" which has by surprise taken the whole world hostage and dictated a complete overhaul in the way we do things.

Government has done whatever is possible with the available means to ensure that available natural and environmental resources are appropriately harnessed to ensure sustainable socio-economic transformation and poverty eradication.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995 requires the State to **protect natural resources** including land, water, wetlands, minerals, oil, fauna and flora; and also requires the State:

- a) To promote sustainable development and public awareness on the need to **manage natural resources** in balanced manner for the benefit of the present and future generations;
- b) To create and develop parks, reserves and recreation areas and ensure conservation of **natural resources**;
- c) To promote the rational use of natural resources so as to safeguard and **protect the biodiversity** of Uganda;
- d) To hold in **trust for the people and protect** natural lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests reserves, wildlife reserves, national parks and any other land to be reserved for ecological and touristic purposes for the common good of all citizens.

The NRM Government has carefully pursued the above aims and this has been central to achieving the rational use of its natural resources and ensuring sustainable development.

This year's Global and National themes, implore us to pay great attention to nature and check our human actions now. The local theme also reminds us that our actions have had detrimental impacts on the environment and that nature is now speaking back to us through various ways including: landslides in mountainous areas, floods and extreme weather conditions i.e. wet and dry conditions.

The theme invites us to rethink our actions and relationship with Nature. It challenges us to remember that nature hosts us and as such we have an obligation to respect and handle it with utmost care and responsibility. It therefore implores us to become diligent stewards to avoid turning ourselves into agents of self-destruction and advocates of unsustainable development.



I should point out that despite government efforts, natural resources continue to be degraded through;

- Destruction of habitats through vegetation clearance, charcoal burning, bush burning causing habitat loss. Wetlands, particularly seasonal wetlands, are rapidly being converted into rice fields, other forms of agriculture, or for seasonal grazing by livestock without measures for sustainable utilization. Wetland in urban areas, are considered prime sites for industrial developments.
- Over-harvesting of resources e.g. fish, leading to fish stocks rapidly declining
- Pollution through discharge of untreated or poorly effluent into water bodies, air pollution, poor solid waste management practices including use of improper disposal of polyethylene carrier bags that degrade the environment.

I wish to remind all Ugandans that the His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda during the Tarehe Sita celebrations on 6th February 2020, gave a directive to ensure that there is no more approval of industries in wetlands.

On 11th February 2020, I did write to the Executive Director of NEMA reminding him to enforce the presidential directive on wetlands including stopping the issuance of any permits in wetlands.

Furthermore on 21st April 2020, His Excellency the President wrote to me with instructions on clearing people from the wetlands, shoreline and the river banks.

On the 30th April 2020, I did write to all Local Authorities communicating the Presidents directive above. I therefore wish to remind all Ugandans to comply with the above directives.

Uganda is also experiencing severe impacts of climate change including the melting of glaciers in Rwenzori mountains, the recent flooding in Kasese and other areas as a result of the bursting of the banks of River Nyamwamba, Nyamugasani, Lubiria among others.

Why is it Time for Nature?

- Agricultural encroachment and expansion- About half of the land area of Uganda is given over to agriculture, mostly small-holder farms growing food crops, as well as cash crops. Subsistence agriculture is the most practiced, but there are several areas of large-scale farmland as well.



Besides the human actions natural resources now also continue to be degraded through climate change effects, diseases and demographic factors.

- Climate change; the climate in Uganda is already changing. The snowfields on the Rwenzori Mountains have been declining for many years, there are extreme weather patterns i.e. rains and sunshine.
- Population increase-this puts more pressure on the available resources.

This jeopardizes both individual livelihoods since they are linked to sound natural resource management and the country's economic development.

What is nature speaking?

The effects/impacts of the continued degradation and misuse of the natural resources are now very evident. Mother Nature has sustained life for centuries but human activities have degraded it to crisis level.

- Water levels in water bodies across the country have been on the rise beyond any earlier known levels in the country's history and they continue to do so;
- Many areas are flooding and have been submerged including; settlements, commercial developments, and other infrastructure.
- Shoreline erosion is taking place hence bringing shorelines closer to our doorsteps,
- Diseases are spreading.
- There is a risk to ground and surface water contamination as a result of poor solid and other forms of waste management.
- Landslides in mountainous areas have become a common occurrence destroying many lives, property and plants and animals.
- Rivers bursting their banks like River Nyamwamba causing loss of lives and property
- Occurrence of floating islands (the Suds) which have been made inevitable by the rise in water levels that has detached huge chunks of land and vegetation from the mainland in various parts of the country close to the lake shores. The
- Livelihoods and lives have been lost.

"Nature is speaking: Listen!"

How should we respond?

The fact that human beings have championed destruction, our actions therefore will still count to reverse the situation. All of us need to respond by taking concrete steps including:

- Stopping encroachment on fragile ecosystems including; wetlands, forests, lake shores and river banks
- Restoring degraded areas to bring balance in ecosystem functions and services
- Planting trees
- Stop settling and cultivation on steep slopes



- Seek for guidance from respective authorities before implementing projects avoid encroaching/ destroying natural habitats for biodiversity.
- Avoid dumping waste in fragile ecosystems and littering
- In light of COVID 19 and nature; Respect biodiversity, their habitats and have-wise interaction with wild animals to reduce human exposure to contagious disease, Maintain "social distance" between animals and humans.

Before I end my address I would like to pay special tribute to Government of Norway represented by the Norwegian embassy for the support extended to Uganda in the review of key laws and regulations guiding environment and natural resource management in the country. Thank you very much!

As we celebrate World Environment Day on June 5th, 2020 let us remember that nature hosts us and our survival depends on the way we handle it. Nature should be handled with utmost care and responsibility for us to benefit from it and the services it provides.

It is **"Time for Nature"** and **"Nature is speaking: Listen!"**

"FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY"