

## **Address at the opening of the Giriyondo Access Facility**

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, South Africa and Mozambique: 16 August 2006

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Honourable Armando Emilio Guebuza,  
Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe,  
Your Excellencies Ministers,  
Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Distinguished guests,  
Community leaders and representatives,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

We are gathered here today to celebrate and witness a historic moment in our collaboration for the conservation of our shared natural and cultural heritage. The inauguration of the Giriyondo access facility in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is indeed a landmark event that bears testimony to our resolve to ensure accomplishment of the objectives of our treaty that established the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

It is indeed fitting that we took a decision to create this Transfrontier Park at this place because this was an ancient confluence of civilisations, which included those of Thulamele and Phalaborwa; civilisations that alternated in their prominence and distinction with those of Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe.

Our common ancestors, who were responsible for those great civilisations that, among other things, specialised in the mining and utilisation of copper, gold and other precious metals, must be smiling because through this Park, we have begun a process of dismantling the artificial and arbitrary borders that separated the same national and cultural groups, the same clans and families.

Inspired by the knowledge of our history and the reality that we are one people, the SADC member states last year adopted the SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, clearly recalling the rich history when the African people of our region collaborated to ensure the successes of those great civilisations that make all of us proud to be African.

Among other things, it is in the context of this SADC Protocol that we should understand the importance of the inauguration of the Giriyondo Access Facility.

We expect that this protocol, together with the SADC Protocol on the Development of Tourism, will facilitate the development of cross-border eco-tourism in the region.

In this regard, all of us have a duty to mobilise our resources, limited as they are, so that this Transfrontier Park and others in our region become successful and shining examples of what we can achieve through common vision, collaboration and joint action.

This Park is a tangible symbol that we can and must use sustainable development to confront the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment and build a better world for all our people.

In his book, *The Hidden Connections... A Science for Sustainable Living*, the environmentalist, author and physicist, Fritjof Capra, observes that one of the hallmarks of life is the conscious shift in power relations, from domination and control to cooperation and partnerships.

For the web of life to function optimally, Capra draws a comparison with scientific endeavours and writes:

"In recent years, biologists and ecologists have begun to shift their metaphors from hierarchies to networks and have come to realize that partnership... the tendency to associate, establish links, cooperate, and maintain symbiotic relationships... is one of the hallmarks of life."

(Capra, F., *The Hidden Connections. A Science for Sustainable Living*; Anchor Books, Random House, New York: 2004, pp. 113-4).

And symbiotic relationships are essential in all spheres of life if we are to create an egalitarian society - a people-centred society - in sustainable environments.

Indeed, our collaborative management of the ecosystems within this Transfrontier Park is very encouraging. It amounts to more than allowing our wild animals to roam freely. It is more than nature conservation. It serves to encourage us further to deepen the co-operation and partnership among our three countries, which has resulted in real sustainable development to the benefit of all our countries, peoples and shared environment.

It is important to note the significant investments on projects in this Park from the time we signed the treaty in 2002. We would like to urge that in the work that we do we empower many of those of our people who have been marginalised, including, those who run SMME's, women, youth and people with disabilities.

I am told that some of the beneficiaries of these employment opportunities and skills development were women. In particular, one of the beneficiaries of our R40 million infrastructure investment and training programme was a woman contractor. Of course, that is not enough. We obviously need more women to benefit from any work that we do in this Park.

Indeed, the three of us here, as Presidents, are firmly committed to the full emancipation of women and we will ensure that more job and economic opportunities are afforded to women. In this regard, when we implement the Five-Year Business and Development Plan for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which is currently being developed and will be implemented from 2007 onwards, we should always remember that there is no compromise on the empowerment of women.

The Giryondo Access Facility, which we open today, is just the beginning of a new era when we will bring down the colonial fences, which divided our nations over several centuries. Today, we take yet another step to free ourselves from the chains of our past and open up to our peoples and wild animals the spaces of freedom as nature has intended. But this is just the beginning of our steps to freedom as we move to the next phase of linking Kruger National Park and Limpopo National Park with the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe.

Again, we are pleased that six potential sites have been identified for the construction of a bridge across the Limpopo River. Our governments are conducting an environmental impact assessment to determine the most suitable site for the bridge between Kruger and Gonarezhou and, once resources are allocated, our vision of a truly open common space for our wildlife will come into fruition.

Your Excellencies and ladies and gentlemen: we are also very pleased that this Park is the result of our excellent public-private partnership with the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), which broke new ground in the facilitation of the development and establishment of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) from as far back as 1990.

Since the signing of the treaty that established the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park in 2002, there has been a growing impetus in our region to ensure that the concept of conservation across borders plays a significant role in shaping Africa's and the world's agenda on conservation.

It was therefore fitting that, in recognition of our successful effort in championing the global conservation agenda, our region hosted the 5th International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress in September 2003.

The theme of the World Parks Congress, as you may recall, was "Benefits beyond Boundaries", which undoubtedly mirrors our celebrations today as we take a step further towards the eradication of the physical barriers that hinder integrated regional conservation and socio-economic programmes.

Africa was honoured with the election of Valli Moosa, the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism of South Africa, as President of the World Conservation Union in 2004. This demonstrates unequivocally that Africa is acknowledged as a leader in re-defining nature conservation, sustainable living and healthy interdependence for flora, fauna, and humankind.

The African Union's programme, The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) urges all of us, as leaders and as citizens of the African continent, to develop and implement coherent action plans and strategies to address the continent's environmental challenges while at the same time promoting socio-economic development and fighting poverty.

In this regard I would like to recall that when we, on behalf of the South African people, asked FIFA for South Africa to host the 2010 Soccer World Cup, we made a commitment that this would be an African event.

Accordingly, that being an African event we should, together, as neighbours and as Africans, plan how we would ensure that indeed it becomes an African showpiece. Of importance, the 2010 Soccer World Cup is an occasion that will create tourism and social and economic opportunities throughout Africa.

I have no doubt that the easy access facilities and open spaces within the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which has been branded as the world's largest animal kingdom, will be a major attraction before, during and after the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We must surely redouble our efforts to ensure that this unique and rich tapestry of life on our planet is turned into a jewel of the tourism market.

We need to build on this potential tourist boom and accelerate Africa's share of the global tourist market, which stood at 4.5 per cent as at 2003. Our Transfrontier Parks (TFPs) and Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), coupled with the 2010 FIFA World Cup, provide us with a unique opportunity for exceptional growth in the tourism industry.

In this regard, we are aware of the joint proposal by Ministers of Environment and Tourism representing nine countries of Southern Africa, namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which seeks to develop and market a Transfrontier Conservation Areas Tourism Route for 2010 and beyond. The tourism route would enable travellers to experience a number of different African countries as a single destination.

The success of the proposal will be conditional on urgent consideration of issues relating to tourism infrastructure investment, security, quality assurance within the hospitality sector and ease of travel within the region. It is imperative that we fully endorse this proposal and endeavour to render support for the development of additional access facilities and associated tourism infrastructure in all the other Transfrontier Conservation Areas.

This Park is part of the African Renaissance. Through this Park, as part of our African rebirth, we seek to redress the legacy of the colonial regional landscape that fragmented ecosystems and separated families and communities. Since December 7, 2005, we have seen the benefits of open access with increasing numbers of our people visiting the Park.

This demonstrates the potential of this Park in reuniting our people as well as contributing to the development of areas around the Park.

I would like to urge the officials responsible for this facility to use their best efforts to maximise the benefits of this facility for the development of eco-tourism in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, without compromising operational efficiency and security procedures.

In conclusion, Your Excellencies, allow me to thank our three Honourable Ministers, Fernando Sumbana, Francis Nhema and Marthinus van Schalkwyk and their teams, for their vision and their great sense of purpose in helping to realise our dream of a truly world-class tourist destination and a wildlife paradise.

I am truly delighted to open jointly with your Excellencies, President Mugabe and President Guebuza the Giriyondo Access Facility. Nature has triumphed and shown us that we can transcend national boundaries and that we can create "benefits beyond boundaries".

Today, our wild animals - the elephants, rhino, antelope and many others are once again beginning to roam freely within the Great Limpopo Transfrontier National Park. They teach us valuable lessons. And we, the people, now have another possibility to reach out and join hands in partnership, co-operation and interdependence.

Thank you.