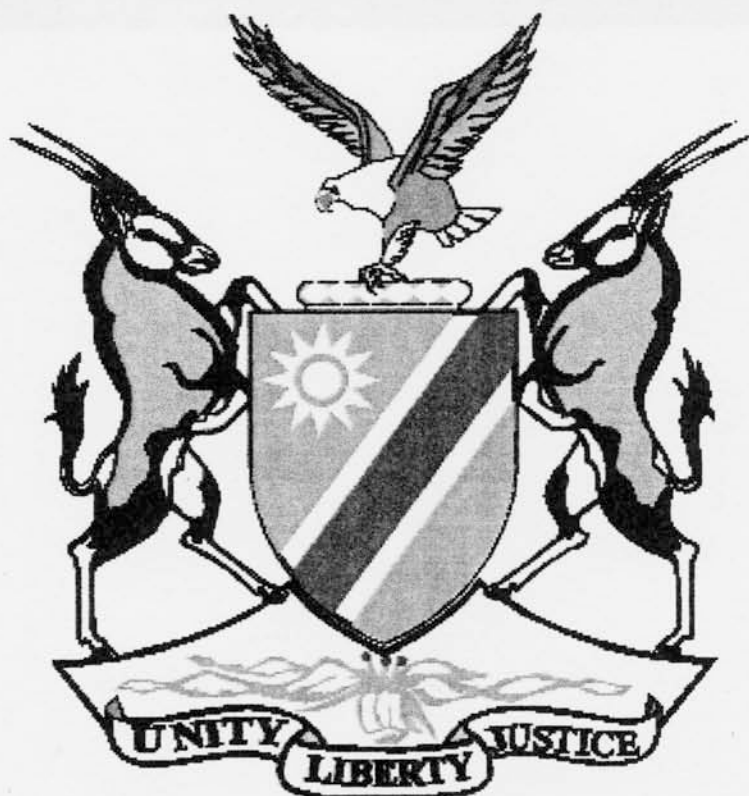


# MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



OPENING SPEECH BY HON. WILLEM KONJORE, MP,  
MINISTER

AT THE 14<sup>th</sup> CONFERENCE OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL LONG-TERM ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH  
(ILTER)

14 AUGUST 2006

GOBABEB  
ERONGO REGION

**Director of Ceremonies**

**Distinguished Invited Guests  
Members of the Media**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me a great pleasure and honour to welcome you here at this important occasion. You could not have chosen a better time than the UN-designated International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD) to come from all over the world to Gobabeb located in the middle of our most beautiful desert, the Namib.

As my Ministry is so involved with the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre, let me begin by describing what a special place this Gobabeb is. Since its establishment in 1962, the Gobabeb Centre has been like a gold mine in terms of enriching our understanding and increasing our knowledge of environmental processes in dry lands – and is unique in its kind world wide.

At the Independence of Namibia in 1990, Gobabeb was transformed into the Oasis of Learning that it is today and is recognized as such as a Centre of Excellence of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for dry lands research, networking and capacity development. The Gobabeb Centre has made good use of the accumulated knowledge concerning natural resources, biodiversity and climate in arid regions.

While continuing to build on this legacy, the Centre also focuses on desertification, water resource management, renewable energy and energy efficiency, and other issues that support sustainable development in Namibia and require a holistic environmental management approach.

Gobabeb is managed as a joint venture between my ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia and is one of our examples of public-private partnerships in the environmental sector in Namibia. Although it is a challenge for a developing country to maintain such an excellent facility we are dedicated to make the centre a success.

**Director of Ceremonies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am pleased to inform you that my Ministry takes the issue of long term environmental monitoring seriously and that is why I am here today to be with you at this milestone event. Long term environmental monitoring is essential for my ministry as it will enable us to make informed decisions about the use and management of natural resources as well as to take adaptive measures especially in this era (now) when environmental pressures such as climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation are rampant.

I have been informed that the theme of this conference is **“On the MOVE: Monitoring Our Variable Environment”**. If we want to understand change, we first need to have a baseline and understand natural variability. Nowhere is the availability of water, for instance, more variable than right here in the Namib Desert. The understanding of variability – times and places with plenty, contrasting with times and places with scarcity – is a fundamental cornerstone of planning in dry lands, including most of Southern Africa. Therefore long-term environmental monitoring is required to understand this variability so as to plan the management of natural resources accordingly.

Long-term research is also required to detect changes. The ability of people in Africa to adapt to global change will depend on good

information obtained through this process and my Ministry therefore practices and strongly encourages long-term environmental monitoring.

The Namibian Environmental Observatories Network, (NaEON), was created by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in 1999 in support of Namibia's responsibilities for the UN Conventions on Biodiversity Conservation, Combating of Desertification, Climate Change and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) rely strongly on long-term environmental monitoring as carried out by Namibian Environmental Observatories Network (NaEON).

Namibian Environmental Observatories Network (NaEON) is a national network of environmental research sites for the early detection and description of environmental change. This includes documentation and analysis of long-term large-scale ecological and socio-economic processes that are revealed through multi-disciplinary research and monitoring. We are proud of Namibian Environmental Observatories Network (NaEON) as it is the first country network in Africa, and we have come to recognise it as a national asset that is truly Namibian "home-grown", while being fertilized by international expertise.

Furthermore, we are aware that our country network has also stimulated the development of Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) in countries throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to also join the International Long-Term Ecological Research Network (ILTER).

We have come to recognise many benefits of Namibian Environmental Observatories Network (NaEON). One of these is that much more value is derived from data through secure archiving, improved accessibility and sharing. Combined with the promotion of synergy and co-operation of

many scientists, many disciplines, institutions and stakeholders, this approach promotes a broad knowledge base and adds context and continuity and is dynamic and adaptive, and reduces costs. This improves the understanding of the environment and simultaneously improves the application of knowledge for sustainable development and for implementation of Namibia's Vision 2030.

**Director of Ceremonies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

We recognise the high value of Long-Term Ecological Research Network (LTER) to serve as an early warning system that can help distinguish between permanent versus temporary environmental changes and between natural and human causes. Long-Term Ecological Research Network (LTER) is therefore one of the best ways of understanding environmental pressures and thresholds of environmental factors that can lead to desertification.

This knowledge and information can be effectively used to guide problem-solving, relating to disasters such as floods and drought, through adaptation, mitigation, and management. In these terms, the commitment required to monitor is minor in comparison to the risks and costs of not monitoring. I am nevertheless fully aware of the challenge for long-term funding commitments required for Long-Term Ecological Research Network (LTER).

**Director of Ceremonies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Human and institutional capacity for Long-Term Ecological Network (LTER) is inadequate world-wide and especially in developing countries like Namibia where it is most urgently required to support sustainable

development. Proactive training programmes in environmental problem solving and technical skills of field monitoring and data management are essential to overcome this and I trust that this conference will promote this.

**Dear participants**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I thank the organisers of this conference for choosing Namibia as the host for this event and for you all for coming to Namibia, to help to put our country, Namibian Environmental Observatories Network (NaEON) and Gobabeb onto the global map. I trust you will find our environment interesting and beautiful. I would like to remind you that 14% of our land is in protected parks, including the Namib-Naukluft Park where we are today. Please have time after this conference to visit, experience and explore the beauty of our desert and our country. I wish you all the best in your deliberations and interactions for the next three days.

With these remarks I now have the honour to declare the 2006 International Long-Term Environmental Research (ILTER) Conference officially opened.

I thank you.