

A NEW DAWN

A CELEBRATION OF EZEMVELO KZN WILDLIFE

REMARKS BY
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PIETERMARITZBURG: MARCH 8, 2002

It is a pleasure for me to be a part of what Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has chosen to call **a new dawn**. The word "dawn" has a certain poetry and has, throughout the history of mankind, carried great significance, both literally and symbolically. The ancient peoples of our world saw the dawn as a driver away of ghosts, the overcomer of the darkness.

Today, we are witnessing a new dawn in conservation in KwaZulu Natal. There is an awakening of awareness within our Province of the interdependence of the sustainability of human life and the conservation of biodiversity. The new light of this dawn shows how each individual can make a significant contribution towards our collective goal to preserve and promote our wildlife, our natural resources and our flora, extracting the full economic, spiritual and social benefit for this generation and the next.

Having been a part of the drive for conservation in South Africa, and particularly in our beautiful Province of KwaZulu Natal, for many years, I am well aware of the history of conservation in our Province. The time-line of conservation here may be traced through several significant events, beginning more or less with the reign of King Shaka who reinforced a conservation ethic of intelligent and respectful use of natural resources. In 1866, the first game law was passed in the colony of Natal, dealing with the protection of birds. This was followed by the colonial proclamation of various game reserves both in Natal, such as Giants Castle, and in KwaZulu, such as Hluhluwe, Mfolozi and Lake St Lucia. However, the road has not always been smooth or marked by successes alone. Devastation followed in the aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, and in the last century, from 1918 to the late 1940s, South Africa experienced a virtual holocaust of its game.

Following the protection of wildlife extended by the colonial administration, the Zululand Parks and Game Board was established. This was followed by the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board, which was abbreviated to the Natal Parks Board, where equal emphasis was placed on fisheries and game concerns. In response to the apartheid government's ideologies, we in the erstwhile KwaZulu Government initiated the Bureau of Natural Resources which then became the Department of Nature Conservation. As Chief Minister, I recognised the importance of nature conservation as well as its inter-departmental and transversal nature, for which reason I made it one of my portfolios. In fact, nature conservation has been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember. I am proud to be associated with a project

which has brought the white rhino back from the brink of extinction, and am honoured to avail my time and efforts towards all sustainable conservation in South Africa.

Through the drive and commitment of its team, the Department of Nature Conservation became a formidable force in KwaZulu Natal within a few years and with very little financial resources. I am saddened to admit that our success led to inevitable interdepartmental jealousies and perhaps one day, for the sake of historical record, we may publish some of the correspondence from that time. It does not make pleasant reading. I mention this merely to show that we did not receive the unconditional support which a project of this nature should command. However, this evening I do not wish to dwell for long on the difficulties of our journey in conservation.

The new dawn for conservation in KwaZulu Natal began with the final amalgamation of the Natal Parks Board and the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation after long and protracted negotiations. The new Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has been built on the strengths of these two parent organisations. This heritage ensures that the enormous challenges facing conservation in this Province may be tackled with experience, skill and courage. We cannot deny or avoid the fact that this is a complex province, but its complexity is also its strength and this is reflected in the composition both of the Board and the staff of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. I wish to take this opportunity to compliment the KwaZulu Natal Nature Conservation Board on its outstanding work. In doing so, I must applaud the leadership of its Chairman, Professor S.V. Nzimande, who is now serving his second term. Likewise, I must commend the CEO, Mr Khulani Mkhize, together with his staff, for their commitment to securing our Province's biodiversity for generations to come. As the Minister giving overarching leadership, I also congratulate Minister Narend Singh and his valuable team.

The vast array of responsibilities of the new organisation range from law enforcement to scientific management, community relationships, game capture, beach and fisheries protection, tourism and a great deal more. The central government has clearly enunciated the importance of tourism to South Africa and the economic benefits that flow from this industry. However, in this Province a special emphasis has been placed on tourism as one of the major potential sources of employment generation. This was strongly highlighted by the Premier of KwaZulu Natal in his recent State of the Province address.

KwaZulu Natal is well placed to play a major role in this regard. The future of eco-tourism, as one aspect of the enormous potential of tourism, is remarkable and must be fully tapped into. In the rapidly changing environment of growing competition, pressure is increasing for conservation to return economic benefits. The benefits of eco-tourism and edu-tourism are already reaching the largely impoverished communities bordering protected areas, particularly through the tourism levy. As we become leaders in eco-tourism it is imperative that we never forget that it is the natural resources and beauty of our Province that provide the attraction which draws tourists. The first priority of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is the protection of these all too fragile resources.

Throughout my life, I have travelled extensively and I have become aware of increasing unease in both Western and Eastern societies. There is a new search for spiritual understanding. This spiritual search was clearly apparent during the recent 7th World Wilderness Congress which I had the privilege to attend. There is a groping for a new dawn of understanding of mankind's role, and many people are looking to the ancient cultures of Africa to find the seeds of new beginnings. Our traditional cultures lived

in an intrinsic understanding of the interdependence of man and his natural environment, which led not only to a state of balance between man and nature, but also to an inner spiritual balance. Modern man seems to need to relearn his place in creation to find a new inner balance which reflects the enormous growth in awareness, spirituality and intellect which we have undergone since the time of our forebears.

Throughout recorded history, foreign men and women have been entranced by Africa and this remains the case today, despite what at times appear to be overwhelming troubles on this continent. There is an indefinable spirit in Africa that since time immemorial has captured the imagination of the world. There is perhaps an ancient African spark that resides in all of us, waiting to be ignited. I believe this is the spark of creativity, of deep cultural roots, of human fellowship and communion with the created world. Deep down, I feel that this is the attraction for all people who come to Africa. Personally, I feel that the dimensions of African spirituality and our natural understanding of our place in creation, will make a great contribution to the shaping of future collective world awareness.

As a Christian, I stand in awe of all creation. For me, the beauty of an African dawn will forever remain a vision unmatched by any throughout time, throughout the world. Indeed, it is through the light of creation that many come to know the eternal characteristics of God. We see His creativity and His brilliance. It is beyond the measure of our understanding to fully appreciate that the Creator who set the planets on their eternal course and placed the stars in the firmament, is the same who delighted in imprinting a tiny sun on the underside of a simple starfish. Faced with the magnitude and complexity of creation, I accept my role as a protector and keeper, a gardener and nurturer of our diverse resources. In so doing, we participate in the great scheme of the great architect of the universe and become instruments of His unfolding creation. I believe that as we recognise our position in the universe, and our capacity of influence, every human being will feel the deep inner urge to preserve our natural environment, to give to our children the blessings our parents have known.

One of the many challenges facing Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is the question of development. It is imperative to strike the right balance and to avoid the pitfalls which have caused many conservation programmes throughout the world to stumble. The national parks in America have struggled with the challenges just as Skukuza, in our own national park, has. We have very small areas of protected land and sensitivity must be practised all the time. I believe that our principal objective should be to enable visitors to have a life-changing experience as a result of visiting our parks. All major development, though important, should be on the periphery.

In the old Natal Parks Board and the Department of Nature Conservation there were always new and innovative ideas and it is this innovative spirit that gives KwaZulu Natal the right to declare itself a leader in conservation. As you know, last year the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park achieved the status of a World Heritage Site. I was extremely pleased to read a letter from Mr David Sheppard, CEO of the World Commission on Protected Areas, expressing his experience of the KwaZulu Natal Nature Conservation Service while in South Africa in 1999 as an evaluator for heritage status. In his letter, he commends the outstanding management of protected areas, noting that it is empowered by "a government which appreciates the vital role of parks in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, particularly in relation to nature-based tourism". This is certainly an accolade for our provincial Minister, Mr Narend Singh.

Operation Rhino, game capture techniques, wilderness trails, turtle protection, wilderness areas and community relationships are our inheritance from the work which has gone before by the forerunners of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. It is essential that we build on their successes and embark on a continuous process of internal organisational examination. One of the many critical needs is the development of sound, working relationships with non-governmental organisations, private game ranchers, tour operators, Amafa, and Royal Zulu, to name but a few. In one way or another, each of these depend on how Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife continues into the future.

I feel that the most important effort which must be undertaken is an increase in education and exchange on matters of nature conservation with people living on the borders of KwaZulu Natal's protected areas. These communities have unique perspectives and knowledge which need to be incorporated into the decision-making of KZN Wildlife. For this reason, community conservation partnerships are a welcome development and should be encouraged. Such partnerships may focus on sustainable programmes to promote culturally, economically, socially and ecologically viable development. The implementation of the community levy began many years ago and has had significantly beneficial results. This is part of a system of consultative co-management which is now replacing law enforcement orientated conservation. I believe this is indeed the brightest hue of the new dawn before us.

I cannot overemphasise the need to take the work of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to the cities. The author and poet, D.H. Lawrence, said "We are bleeding at the roots because we are cut off from the earth and the sun and the stars". With the ever-increasing urbanisation of our country, our roots in rural areas are being destroyed. It is our duty to educate new urban generations to respect the earth and honour wild places from whence many of our cultures emerged. Our youth in particular need to be taken into the wilderness areas by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and organisations like Mbewu, to learn from the elders, the way many of us of the older generation have done. In the near future, the decisions of our youth could have far-reaching effects on conservation. They need the opportunity of "listening to the land" and having their dreams unfold on the red earth of Africa.

My dear friend, the late poet and writer Sir Laurens van der Post, wrote as a reminder to the world that when he walked in Africa, he was able to walk among the mysteries and complexities of his own heart and mind and spirit, which he could not have reached in any other manner. Perhaps therein resides the miracle and meaning of Africa for all of us. This is our home, our heartland. Let us be proud to open her treasures to those for whom such beauty and diversity remain a distant and romantic dream. As a whole, mankind has been given the vastness of creation, but as an African people, we feel a particular sense of belonging and ownership when we stand in a new dawn on African soil.

I give my full support to the work of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, trusting that with enthusiasm, good leadership, wisdom and courage, it will meet the challenges of conservation in a changing world, so that together we may greet a new dawn of true prosperity in KwaZulu Natal.

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