



MEDIA STATEMENT

BY

**Mr. Teofilus Nghitila, Executive Director
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM**

**Update on the recent auctioning of elephants
9th March 2022**

WINDHOEK

Let me take this opportunity to greet and welcome you all to this press conference, which the Ministry has arranged to engage with you, members of the media, in order to provide an update and to further clarify the circumstances around the recent auction and export of elephants from Namibia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start this morning by stating that the mandate of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism is derived from Article 95 L of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, which obliges the State to ensure “the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity and the utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future”.

The conservation and sustainable utilization of our living natural resources is therefore anchored in our Constitution as well as in various international agreements to which Namibia is a Party to, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna.

As a sovereign state, with our own laws, policies and plans, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism is confident that Namibia is taking sound decisions and setting a positive agenda for the conservation of our living natural resources. This is based not on the emotive arguments of animal rights and other individuals but rather on the collective involvement of our communities and farmers in conservation and making sure that conservation is beneficial to and for our people. This is an approach that has proven to be successful in the recent past and we are convinced that it will continue to be successful in the present and in the future.

It is worth noting that the world’s most authoritative report on the state of biodiversity, the fifth Global Biodiversity Outlook, published in 2020, highlighted how the global rate of biodiversity loss is unprecedented. Yet in Namibia we continue to see increasing populations of many high value and globally endangered species, including elephant.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In December 2020, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism took the decision to put 170 elephants for auction in an effort to relieve the pressure from human elephant conflict on communities in the four hotspot areas of Omatjette, Kamanjab, Grootfontein-Kavango Cattle Ranch and Grootfontein-Tsumkwe.

This decision was not taken lightly but is a decision that is fully in line with our national laws and policies and various international agreements to which we are a Party. We are furthermore fully confident that it will not jeopardize the overall population and health of elephants in the country at large, which is currently stands at 24 091 (Twenty-four

thousand and ninety-one), (census of 2016 elephants survey). While there is an estimated 1 172 elephants in north-west.

As recently as last year, the Ministry launched, after a very thorough consultative process, the National Elephant Conservation and Management Plan for the next decade. This Plan documents the challenge of human elephant conflict in Namibia, including in the hotspot areas targeted by this auction. Reducing wildlife population numbers in certain areas is in fact a conservation tool and a conservation management strategy that has proven to be effective in Namibia, where we routinely translocate threatened and endangered animal species to other parts of Namibia as well as to other countries. The National Elephant Conservation and Management Plan also states that elephant population reduction should be considered in certain instances.

As the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has repeatedly recognized in recent years, human wildlife conflict is one of the most difficult challenges we face. Complaints of damage from wildlife, particularly elephants, to crop fields, livestock, humans and infrastructure such as fences, gates and water installations are complaints we as a Ministry need to respond to and deal with on a constant and consistent basis. Those who trivialize this issue ought to be more sensitive to the plight of our communities and farmers and recognize as we do that human wildlife conflict is a serious challenge. If it is not managed carefully, it has the potential to reverse all our conservation gains including the increased elephant numbers across the country.

Most of our critics, fail to recognize that Namibia's conservation has been a success because people have accepted to co-exist with animals. However, this co-existence is truly threatened by cases of human wildlife conflict and we would not want to imagine what could happen when people in their frustration no longer accept sharing their living spaces with wild animals. Both human and animal lives matter and we will continue to take difficult decisions to ensure our continued co-existence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To our fellow Namibians, I wish to encourage that we start to follow conservations in the country at all times to understand how and why some decisions are taken and not only react negatively after a decision is taken. Most people will criticize without understanding the basis of our decisions, even when these are anchored in our existing laws, policies and plans.

With regard to this particular process, I would wish to put on record that it was done in a fully open and transparent manner. The auction was undertaken through a public tender advertised in national media for everyone to see and to ensure fair and equal opportunity to those interested in taking part. Ample time was given, as per procurement requirements, for bidders to prepare and submit their bids. We have also provided

periodic updates on the process as far as was legally possible through media releases and answers to general media and public inquiries. However it should be noted that tender processes have limitations as to what details can be put in the public domain at certain stages. This should not be construed as the Ministry being secretive, but is simply out of compliance with procurement-related procedures and processes.

I also take this opportunity to reject the insinuation that the funds generated from the auction are tainted by corruption and will be pocketed by individuals. The money raised through the auction is deposited directly to the account of the Game Product Trust Fund and is to be utilized for the conservation of our wildlife, and particularly for the management of human wildlife conflict. The accounts of the Game Product Trust Fund are audited by independent auditors each year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By way of update, I wish to inform you that of the 170 adult elephants offered for sale, only 57 were successfully sold and the buyers were Namibian entities, who by virtue of being the successful bidder, became the legal owners of those elephants. Once the successful bidders have ownership of the elephants, they are within their rights to utilize them in any way, provided it is within the confines of our domestic and international laws.

On Friday 5th March 2022, the 22 elephants, captured from the Kamanjab commercial farming area in the Kunene region and supplied to one of the successful bidders, were exported to the United Arab Emirates. The elephants arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday 6th March 2022 and are reported to be doing well. I wish to clarify in this case that the export of these elephants was a private transaction between the private owner of the elephants and their clients in the United Arab Emirates. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism had no stake in this transaction apart from providing the necessary permits as were applied for by the owner.

For your further information, the 22 elephants exported to UAE were captured from 3-5 September 2021 in the Kamanjab area and generated a total of N\$3.3 million (average price per elephant of N\$150,000). The 15 elephants bought by Naankuse were captured from 31 August to 1 September 2021 in the Khorixas area (part of the Omatjete population). This generated a total of N\$1.125 million (average price per elephant of N\$75,000). The money for all supplied elephants is paid to the Game Product Trust Fund.

The 20 remaining elephants will be supplied once the necessary permits have been acquired, once the sales agreement is signed and the funds are paid to the Game Product Trust Fund. This will generate revenue of N\$1.5 million (average price per elephant N\$75 000). It is furthermore important to note that all of the above-mentioned amounts do not include any costs related to capture, translocation or care of the elephants and that the buyers are responsible for all of these costs.

With these few remarks, I thank you for your attention.