

Welcome Remarks from Henry Ndede, UN Environment – AAW CONFERENCE

Good Morning everyone.

Mine is to make welcoming remarks on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme.

I share with you messages of goodwill from our Executive Director, Inger Andersen; the Director of Governance Affairs Office, Jorge Laguna; and Alexander Juras - the head of the Civil Society Unit. Alexander will be with us later today, for tomorrow as well as for the next day.

May I start by congratulating all the Africa Animal Welfare Group for organizing this conference. As this is your third conference – this gathering has evolved and gained its own momentum. We are reaching a point where significant milestones are being achieved and recorded.

Personally, I appreciate the diversity of representation at this conference...and congratulations to ANAW for having signed yet another MoU with UNEP for the next few years.

May I also share with you our historical nature as humans. Human history is full of depiction of mankind as basically cruel by nature. Going back, the history of savage wars in Europe, Americas, Africa, Asia minor are self evidence of our brutal nature. World wars, social strifes, the manufacturing of weapons of mass destruction are all symptoms of our innate selfishness. We have demonstrated instinctive cruelty at different times in our history.

Therefore, when you come to a conference like this on animal welfare, it is a reminder that a reversal of our instinctive cruel nature is important. We then become conscious that something else needs to be done... and very clear that human society is inextricably linked to animal life. Human-Animal history is etched in rock art and paintings caves and pyramid in Africa, Americas, Asia and Middle East. These depict the human-animal relationships in culture, food security, pleasure, worship etc. Wooden animal carvings and bronze mounds as totems and symbols of worship; animal paintings to depict hunting or being glorified in one way or the other.

We've used animals as source of food ... used them in battle and war ... used and utilized them for trade and improve our economics. Therefore, when you want to call on animal welfare consciousness, it is critical that we look at things differently.

When I look at animal welfare today, the donkey is actually the poster animal of animal suffering; feral cats and dogs are the poster animals of neglect; the elephant, the rhino, the tiger, primates – all these are poster animals of human's selfish animal slaughter for their trophies.

So when you look at caged animals in confined captive space for factory farming, just as has been presented by representative of Compassion in World Farming it epitomized human insensitivity to animal suffering. This is the consciousness that we must arouse when debating about animal welfare.

Now, what is the UNEP's connection to this?

Having congratulated ANAW for signing another MoU with UNEP, the network has achieved a major milestone and breakthrough to increase animal welfare consciousness on a global platform. Your Patron, Nehemiah Rotich, will remind you that a few years ago when we engaged in the first conference of ANAW in Nairobi, UNEP frowned at this idea of animal welfare – at least in the context of the donkey being the focal animal. A lot of people within UNEP fraternity never fully understood what it was, and would make snide remarks that it was just about donkeys and nothing

more. In fact I recall one colleague making a remark “how can you go to a conference on animal welfare? What does it help you with? And you know, animals do not have rights!!

But that was some time back. The needle has shifted since then...things have changed...and I would like to congratulate your persistent focus and the way you have achieved that milestone. Your connection with UNEP provides a veritable platform to sensitize the world on animal welfare and wellbeing. It also provides a forum to share applied researched science to influence policy on animal welfare. This platform should become a nexus of Sustainable Development Goals with respect to the wholistic approach to human-animal relationships.

The connection of animals with many SDGs can be gleaned through numerous prisms of: hunger; poverty; economy; welfare; sustainability; life on land; life under water; climate change; biodiversity; decent work...just to mention a few. This is a good forum to mainstream the SDGs.

So, ANAW as a very strong lobby group for animal welfare. You need to keep focus and exert pressure so that there can be a common understanding through a common denominator that there is need for welfare for both domesticated animals and wildlife.

When we talk about welfare and well-being, to me it is a remedial measure to the atrocities and cruelty metted to animals and imposed by humans. When I listened to Dr. Mwenda Mbaka of World Animal Protection, on his postulation of the cortisol effect in animals, I fully resonated with the whole concept. When talking about well-being and welfare, we are talking about empathy, consciousness, caring, compassion... we are talking about physical, psychological and physiological well-being of animals. And of course there are positives to this particular framework of mind because it has its dividends. Animals that are well taken care of reproduce better and have production, which is to our nutritional benefit ... especially in the face of the increasing human population on this planet.

So why do we need animals?

It is obvious that animals are a natural resource for our aesthetics, economics, agriculture, transport, and numerous other commercial activities. For instance we need animals like dogs for security; horses for sport; cats for vermin control; many for food; others for recreational purposes. We use animals for biomedical research – but whether this is ethical or not, it is an issue I leave for this forum to dialogue on.

But when we keep the diversity of animals, we create and maintain a gene pool. This is very important because new diseases continue to emerge and we need to develop medicines for them, and many times, we apply animal trials. A stable genetic/gene pool is very useful. An evolving frontier of new science and technology continues to collaborate and share knowledge on how animals can help solve some of the challenges that we face as human beings.

So what does this conference need to do?

For this conference – given the milestones that you have achieved – it is important that you push for the sustainable utilization and protection of animals as your clarion call. The same way in the SDG we have sustainable consumption and production, I would say this conference should be pushing for sustainable utilization and protection of animals.

You also need to push for active policies and laws both at the national and subnational levels, so that there is a common understanding of how harmonious and sustainable coexistence can take place between human beings and animals that share this planet.

This conference is also a reminder that even when the holy scriptures tell of “have dominion over the earth”, in my interpretation this does not refer to cruelty to animals. My reading of this meaning is more on the nurturing, taking care, and it is critical that we are all reminded of this. There is need for an increased engagement on animal welfare and well-being to accelerate a paradigm shift for better understanding of our relationships with the animal world.

In her presentation, Emma Slawinski of Compassion in World Farming, alluded to a push for a global agreement for regenerative agriculture. I would say that perhaps this is the time to seek and build consensus on a UN Convention on Animal Welfare, it is high time for it. We really need to think. Let us learn the lessons from CITES – what has CITES done, what can you do differently under the animal welfare discourse.

The first step for that convention could probably be as early as during the next UNEA 5. If you worked collaboratively together and actually push for a resolution on animal welfare, you might just get there if you a set of member states interested in sponsoring such a motion. Such would be one useful step in that particular direction. I recall Alexander Juras and I discussing how best the civil society could contribute to the formulation of the theme of the Assembly. Your petition or motion on the issue of animal welfare must resonate with the theme of the Assembly.

As we speak, the discussion on the theme of the next assembly is ongoing. Perhaps if the civil society are given up to end of October, you will probably provide coherent inputs because the theme of next assembly has to be ready by 31 December 2019. So, again, this is an opportunity for you to look at the proposals on options for the theme that have come up and see what contributions you can make.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to say there is need for increased advocacy, development of legal instruments, formulation of strategies, programmes, action plans, and effective public communication. I am pleased to have seen all these elements reflected in the programme for this conference, and that you will cover them for the next few days.

Ultimately what do you want to take home from here?

What do we want to go back with to your countries and institutions from this conference?

It is very important that when we leave here...when we finish and conclude the conference on Wednesday...we actually are in agreement that there is a convergence of ideas at this forum in terms of cooperation and collaboration in science, in terms of technology transfer, on issues policy and laws. Whereas do not have to conclude, we still have to show that we are moving together in the same direction with these aspiration. With all these dimensions, you need to convince member states that this is something whose time has come...especially from you as advocates of animal welfare.

Ladies and gentlemen...dear colleagues... I would like to say that personally I am very privileged to have been part of this conference. The few presenters who have already raised the curtain have made me learn a lot, and I would like to say that UNEP is happy to be associated with you.

Let us use UNEA 5 to move the needle, so that there can be transformative action in the proper direction to highlight the goals and objectives of animal welfare.

With those few remarks, I would say I wish you the best for this conference.

Thank You