

FOURTH ANNUAL CONSERVATION WEEK

ULUNDI

24TH APRIL, 1985

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SPEECH BY MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI,  
CHIEF MINISTER KWAZULU

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Mr Chairman, Honourable Minister, Members of the Legislative Assembly, Senior Officials, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is for me a particular pleasure to extend a very warm welcome to all of you present here at our Fourth Annual Conservation Week. Once again, we have come together to demonstrate the very sincere commitment of the KwaZulu Government towards the wise use of the natural resources of our beautiful country.

Black South Africa faces the immense task of making a telling contribution towards creating a society in which there will be justice, peace and equality of opportunity for all. We are involved as Blacks in a struggle of epic proportions. We face the dehumanising system of apartheid in every walk of life, and as we strive to establish a decent future for every South African, we are again and again confronted with harsh racism. The non-violent struggle for liberation stretches every Black involved in it to his or her limit. There are some who have become so disheartened by the slowness of progress towards normalising South African society that they have come to believe that the time has passed for reasoned talking, and are either bent upon using the kind of confrontation which will make this country ungovernable, or they are bent upon mounting an armed struggle which will defeat Pretoria militarily.

It is mistaken in judgement to regard all those who have abandoned non-violent strategies as communist agents or as criminals. Everyone of us has limits to our endurance and only those who have lived in deeply deprived Black societies know what a heroic effort it takes not to throw up one's hands in despair and to seek recourse to violence as the only means of bringing about real change.

I thank God that the majority of Black South Africans have inner resources which show a fortitude which is a tribute to their humanity. I find myself again and again having to appeal to Blacks not to lose their humanity in the process of struggling for liberation. It is in this context that I express my gratification for the way in which people in KwaZulu are responding to the call for conservation. Poverty harshens attitudes and the desperately poor take what they can get today and feel they cannot afford to think about tomorrow. The desperately poor across the length and breadth of Africa and other parts of the Third World have so often

stripped nature's resources of their reproductive capacity simply because they sought to survive. When communities are faced with survival problems and nonetheless turn to conserve natural resources around them, we must be deeply grateful.

Conservation everywhere in the world necessitates control measures and even in the most affluent of societies, laws have to be enacted to preserve natural heritages. The Bureau of Natural Resources is at times faced with having to be tough, but I am deeply grateful however that its primary task is that of employing persuasion and reason, and not of relying on punitive measures to conserve the rich bounties of nature which have come so close to being destroyed.

The Bureau of Natural Resources is not only faced with getting people to conserve nature. It is their awesome lot to turn the tide of over-exploitation and to ensure the regeneration of natural resources in the areas which have been set aside for preservation. Vast poverty has led to over-grazing and everywhere the natural forestation which preserved the ecological integrity of our veld and vlei has been threatened by over-exploitation. That which is there must be saved and that which has already been lost must be regained. This is a task no government department can accomplish on its own and the Bureau of Natural Resources ultimately depends on the success with which it pursues conservation diplomacy in the search for co-operation among ordinary people.

This year's Conservation Week is highlighting the core need of looking at forests as the great protectors of our environment. There is always something magnificent and splendid about forests but they have a utility which equals their splendid grandeur. I believe we should see forests as nature's battalions guarding against erosion.

As head of the government of KwaZulu, I am proud of the reputation we are gaining as being one of, if not the, most conservation conscious administration in the Southern African region.

Our achievements have been reported fairly widely in the media and I do not intend to list all of them here. I would, however, like to mention a few of the most important accomplishments of the past year. Of major importance was the fact that no less than 22 young Zulu men were enrolled at the Cwaka Agricultural College to study for a Diploma in Nature Conservation at the beginning of the year. The significance of this event will readily be grasped when I tell you that at the present moment we have only 14 qualified Zulu staff members serving in the Bureau of Natural Resources. While dealing with staff matters it is a real pleasure for me to report that two of these 14 Zulu Nature Conservators have attained the rank of Senior Nature Conservator on merit. I offer my warmest congratulations to the two men concerned.

That we are gaining the reputation of being a conservation conscious administration should not come as a surprise to anyone. Zulus have always been very good conservationists. Our whole history and heritage is based on sound conservation principles.

traditional leaders and their tribal councils is clear evidence of this. The KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources reports that it is somewhat overwhelmed by this support and is experiencing difficulties in doing all the work involved in developing these areas. It is in fact, presently appointing additional staff members to cater for this demand. There are presently eight tribal resources areas under consideration. This is very noteworthy support for conservation on the part of the people of KwaZulu, and is surely tangible evidence of their commitment to conserving natural resources.

While on the subject of achievement I must report that the beaches of Maputaland had a peaceful Christmas season for the first time in many years. The closure of these beaches to vehicles was due in no small measure to the efforts of the Bureau of Natural Resources and they are to be congratulated for achieving what conservationists all over South Africa have desired for some time now. Having achieved control of the beaches, the next step is the provision of tourist facilities along the Maputaland coast and this matter is a high priority for 1985.

The vitality of the Bureau of Natural Resources is evidenced by the vigorous expansion of its work during the course of last year. We already have a small staff presence in four out of five of the patrol areas in KwaZulu. The limited funds at the disposal of the Bureau limits the extent to which all the patrol areas can be adequately staffed, but whether we have a small token staff in an area, or whether an area has adequate staff, officers of the Bureau are grappling with the massive problems that conservation in under-developed areas presents. People everywhere are successfully being encouraged to co-operate with the KwaZulu Government in preserving their natural heritage.

At the opening of our Conservation Week last year, I made the point that we shall not have a worthwhile future unless we learn to exploit nature's bounty with a sense of responsibility to future generations.

Today, we are gathered here to examine the situation regarding our indigenous forests. We have to learn lessons which will enable us to harvest those products on which we depend, and yet still be able to pass on to our children forests which are functioning systems.

I use the term "functioning systems" in describing forests, as I wish to stress that a forest is not merely a collection of trees clumped haphazardly together on a hillside. Forests are very elaborate systems indeed, and in addition to the interaction and interdependence of the animals and plants that occur within them, man himself is to a large extent dependent on forests for his survival.

In KwaZulu we have just come through both the worst drought and the worst flood in living memory. During both the drought and the flood, we were confronted with harsh reminders as to the effects of deforestation.

During the drought, we noticed how quickly streams dried up in areas where forests had been cleared. Conversely in those areas where the forests remained intact, we noticed that the streams continued to flow throughout the drought. There is no doubt that the devastation caused by cyclones Démonia and Imboia was aggravated by the removal of natural vegetation in the catchments of the major rivers. I wonder just how much precious top soil washed out to sea in the wake of these two cyclones.

The two functions of forests, namely the ability to absorb and retain moisture, and the ability to prevent soil loss, are indeed possibly the most important justification for the strict protection of forests.

There are, of course, many other very sound and important reasons for conserving forests, and I am sure we shall hear more about them later today. However, soil and water are two life-supporting commodities of such basic importance that I believe the conservation of forests is justified for this reason alone.

Our speakers today, will address the problem of how we should go about conserving our forests, and I do not wish to preempt them now. I must, however, stress the fact that successful forest conservation will depend on two factors, namely sound conservation management, including a national utilization policy, and the provision of alternative sources of the commodities for which people so often strip forests.

It is gratifying to me that the Bureau of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture have co-operated in the planning of this Symposium. I am sure that the co-operation shown here today reflects a continuing day-to-day co-operation within which common objectives are striven for as each pursues their individual aims. The Bureau of Natural Resources is responsible for the management of indigenous forest and the forestry section of the Department of Agriculture has the important task of providing alternative sources of timber by means of establishing woodlots.

I would like to thank all the speakers at this Symposium for coming here today to give us the benefit of their knowledge and experience. I can assure them of our attentive interest. KwaZulu takes forest conservation very seriously indeed and we will listen to the speakers who will address us carefully.

In this vein, I feel that it is appropriate to thank Gencor for sponsoring the audio visual presentation we are about to see. This presentation has been made in the interests of forest conservation, and in the interests of promoting the establishment of woodlots in KwaZulu. This presentation is extremely well put together, and I am sure that it will succeed in communicating valuable information.

I must also say a special word of thanks to Dr Ian Player, our Chairman. Dr Player has a great deal of experience as a Chairman, and I am sure his presence will ensure that the Symposium proceeds smoothly.

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