

4th Africa Animal Welfare Conference (Virtual)

Closing Remarks by H.E. Francisca Ashietey – Odunton,

Ghana High Commissioner to Kenya

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished participants,**

It is my great pleasure to be part of this timely discussion, and from all the interventions made over the course of this conference, it is quite clear that there is a genuine seriousness on the the need for adopting nature based solutions in all aspects of animal welfare, wildlife and environmental conservation, and sustainable development in Africa. I must say this falls in line with the theme of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 5)-“strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”.

I would first like to extend my appreciation to the Patron of the conference Prof. Nkansah Obrempong for initiating this invaluable forum, and the participants for injecting and maintaining a sense of urgency and heightened awareness about the issues before us.

As you may all be aware this conference was scheduled to be held in Accra, Ghana, but due to the unprecedented global health crisis, things changed. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the world as a whole has progressively moved towards alternate forms of gathering-using virtual meeting platforms, hence our meeting virtually. Indeed, it would have been different meeting and interacting in person in my home country.

The COVID-19 pandemic experience has taught us in a sober manner that animal welfare is core to every aspect of our lives. The way we interact and handle animals, both domestic and wild, have critical consequences on human health, the environment and economic development of every nation across the globe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the four days’ intensive and rich deliberations, it is obvious that wildlife and livestock are indeed important resources in Africa. They contribute to ecosystem services, ecotourism, sustainable livelihoods, food security and resilience against unpredictable shocks including those from climate change, and the impact we are experiencing currently from the pandemic.

The need to safeguard nature, biodiversity and ecosystems including life on land as well as life under water is even more crucial now. Hence, animal welfare must be core in our nations’ policies and strategies. However, achieving an ideal situation in the context of sustainable development comes with a myriad of challenges. Loss and degradation of habitats, and the related risks for both human and animal health, including the emergence of zoonotic diseases are some of the challenges

we are faced with today. The global demand for food has also led to the pursuit for more land in Africa degrading the ecosystem; rapid population growth; intensification of agriculture leading to factory farming; a thriving global market for wild animals and their products, are all some of the challenges.

A key solution to most these challenges is identifying and adopting nature based solutions. I am glad that this approach has been discussed in detail. It also gives me a lot of pleasure to know that the United Nations Environment Assembly has placed this approach as its theme in upcoming meeting in 2021 as I noted earlier. This requires each and every one of us, from the United Nations, governments, civil society, academia, private sector, and individuals to play our part in implementing the well-articulated resolutions arrived at at this forum.

I am delighted to note that we have government representatives from countries across Africa participating in this conference. Your presence is a key statement that the continent is keen to take up the solutions discussed in this forum for the benefit of our respective countries, people and animals. We should all play a role in mainstreaming the already discussed Animal Welfare Strategy in Africa (AWSA) with the support of the Africa Union-Inter Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm we all now have a strong understanding about the connections between a healthy environment and human life. The inter-linked nature between the health of people, animals and the environment. This is the understanding that we all need to have in order to avert potential future pandemics such as the COVID-19. I am glad that various speakers and panellists as well as active participants did an outstanding job sharing with us, their valuable knowledge, insights and experiences about this crucial topic at this point in time. This message must flow to our respective countries, organizations, villages and families. We all need to adopt the One Health approach. My country, Ghana, has in the past one year developed a plan to enhance animal disease surveillance to improve the country's capacities in detection, prevention, and response of transmissible animal diseases or threats, including zoonoses. We all need to ensure that we are not caught off guard by another preventable zoonotic disease.

Let me – once again – express my sincere thanks to all of you for your meaningful and active participation and immense contributions to the discussions of this timely conference.

I am also honoured to, on behalf of the Ghana Government, to invite you to the 5th Africa Animal Welfare Conference to be held in Ghana next year. Let me sell a bit of Ghana to you. It is a middle income country, committed to democratic governance, with a conducive political and economic environment. It is now my greatest pleasure and privilege to declare the 4th animal welfare conference officially closed. Thank you and I look forward to seeing all of you in Ghana next year.

H.E. (Mrs.) Francisca Ashietey – Odunton,
Ghana High Commissioner to Kenya
Date: 10th September, 2020