

Wildlife protection can create jobs for youth, promote tourism says UN Resident Coordinator on World Wildlife Day

The UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Rosa Malango has said that protecting the environment and wildlife can create job opportunities for that youth and spur sustainable development.

Speaking at the World Wildlife Day celebrations, held on March 3rd , in Kasese town near the ice-caped Rwenzori Mountain and Queen Elizabeth National Park, Ms Malango also said tourism should benefit local communities.

“Protecting the environment and protecting wildlife are opportunities for job creation and responsible tourism,” Ms Malango, who is also the UNDP Resident Representative, said.

“So, let us train more guides, more rangers, more story tellers, let us establish more eco-friendly transportation and support entrepreneurs in arts and culture,” she added.

Ms Malango called for substantial investment in road safety to ensure that pedestrians, cyclists and motorists move around safely “as we promote tourism.”

This year's World Wildlife Day focussed on; *'Big Cats: Predators under threat* while the local theme was; *"Creating a Safe Environment for Survival of Big Cats in Uganda."*

Big cats include; the Cheetah, Clouded leopard, Jaguar, Leopard, Lion, Puma, Snow Leopard, and Tiger. Uganda is home to three of these; the lion, the leopard and the cheetah and there is a rapid reduction in the numbers due to; poaching, illegal wildlife trade, climate change and loss of habitat.

"We may wonder, why it is important to celebrate and protect these big cats – after all they are predators. We must remember that they remain important species whose protection also safeguards the vast landscapes they live in. Protecting them is a key part of keeping our entire ecosystems," Ms Malango said.

Big cats are one of the biggest attraction for tourists visiting Uganda's game parks. Statistics from Uganda Tourism Board show that tourists coming to Uganda have increased from 540,000 in 2006 to 1.32million today.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, in his remarks delivered by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, promised that Government would protect all animals and their habitat.

“The Government prioritises tourism and conservation. Uganda almost lost her wildlife to poaching and lawlessness. With the restoration of peace, this has been reversed,” Mr Museveni said. “We have been able to reverse extinction of some species,” the president added.

In 1983, Rhino became extinct. However, in 1997 conservationists formed Rhino Fund Uganda (RFU) which, with support from Government and UNDP, has now multiplied the number to 21 Rhinos, now roaming the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary in Nakasongola district.

The President also warned poachers that their syndicate of wildlife crime and illicit drugs will be defeated. He said Tourism Police Force and a special court have been set up for that purpose.

“Poachers must know we have defeated terrorism and we are going to come for them...”

Tourism Minister Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu said the “Big Cats” anchor tourism. “If a tourist goes back without seeing a lion, he feels cheated. A lion is loved,” Mr Kamuntu said.

“The leopard is admired for its stealthiness while every child wants to be as fast as a Cheetah. Where would the world be without these animals?” the minister asked.

Kasese Municipality Mayor, Kabyanga Godfrey, said a reduction in entry fees to parks would boost local tourism. He also said big cats “are Uganda’s selling point” and must be protected.

At the event, the “*Product Review and Marketing Strategy for the Rwenzoris*,” supported by the World Wildlife Fund, was unveiled by the Prime Minister. A *National Wildlife Art Challenge 2018* was also launched. Awards were given to leading conservations, including a group of former poachers who abandoned the vice.

Katunguru Primary School and Mobuku Valley Secondary School won prizes for topping the conservation quiz competition.

About World Wildlife Day:

World Wildlife Day is celebrated annually since 2013 was designated by United Nations to celebrate and raise awareness of the world’s wild animals and plants and the need to fight against human destruction of wildlife. **ENDS**