UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

SPEECH BY PROF. PETER M.F. MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI DURING THE PATHWAY CONFERENCE 2016 HELD AT MT. KENYA SAFARI CLUB IN NANYUKI ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016 AT 5.00 P.M.
• The Organizers, Pathways 2016 Conference
• Conference Sponsors
• Conservation Managers and Scientists from across the globe
• Distinguished guests
• Ladies and Gentlemen
I take this opportunity to welcome you to Nanyuki, at the foot of Mt. Kenya, and to our great country as you take the next few days to deliberate on various conservation issues.

As you are aware, the tourism sector in Kenya is the second largest source of foreign exchange revenue following agriculture. A great blend of diverse wildlife, landscapes and cultures support this sector of our economy, which in addition also gives us a national heritage. However, this blend is not without conflicts and challenges, for instance, between human and wildlife, wildlife and livestock, conservation and other human activities like urbanization, among others. Kenya is not alone as the whole of Africa is going through a lot of changes in land use and land tenure
systems. This, coupled with increasing human population and land use changes, continues to challenge the management of the human-wildlife-livestock interface.

In Africa, 99% of the land does not have title deeds, yet the process of changing land tenure systems is a reality. Therefore, the theme of this conference, “Conflict and Co-existence” is apt, timely and relevant. It is my hope that this conference will play a key role in highlighting the current and future opportunities and challenges of conservation and sustainability.

Ladies and gentlemen, seventy per cent (70%) of tourists coming to Kenya come to view wildlife in their natural
habitat. Recently, i.e. in December 2015, Kenya has been voted as the world’s leading safari destination in the world by the World Travel Awards (WTA). Indeed, Kenya has taken community-based wildlife conservation ahead in a number of approaches: for instance, the establishment of the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) as an umbrella body for all the community wildlife conservancies and entrenchment of the community-based wildlife conservation approach in our Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013.

For the last four years, the Kenyan government has embarked on implementation of the 2010 constitution.
In this constitution, devolution of governance is key, with the aim of bringing services closer to the people. This way, human-wildlife dimensions are being given a new impetus and approach, for example, by bringing on board community participation in wildlife management and conservation. The policy gives the legal framework to ensure equitable sharing of benefits and opportunities emanating from wildlife farming. Communities are also expected to benefit immensely.

The University of Nairobi, the premier institution of higher learning in Kenya, is undertaking research and community outreach to inform policy development to enhance the sustainability of the community conservation approach.
Although community conservation is gaining credence, recent research has identified the need for rethinking of this approach of conservation as reviewed through community perceptions. The new Wildlife Act 2013 has therefore, come in handy to address this challenge by giving communities opportunities to benefit from wildlife conservation through e.g. farming of various wildlife species.

On their part, stakeholder organizations such the Africa Conservation Centre (ACC) and the Rangelands Association of Land Owners and others have further forged forward to come up with strategies for improving the sustainability of the community wildlife conservation approach. The University of Nairobi, through the African Dryland Institute
for Sustainability (ADIS) is a key partner in this initiative. The Institutional Canopy of Conservation (I-CAN) initiative has also enhanced this knowledge and research in ecosystem management. The University of Nairobi in collaboration with Mc-Gill University, Canada and African Conservation Centre is a key partner in the I-CAN initiative.

We are also having other partnerships through students exchange programs that promote the concept of one health: a holistic approach to the ecosystem; human and animal health. A number of students from the University of Nairobi have already been trained through this program. We are also currently collaborating with Moi University on public health together with other institutions in East and Central Africa.
Through such initiatives, we have been able to address cross-border zoonotic diseases in partnership with USAID. One way of countering these challenges is through capacity building at all levels, from the land and conservation entities’ managers to researchers.

The University of Nairobi offers various degree programmes at BSc and PhD levels that support this mission, as well as the conservation and tourism industry. Examples of such programmes include Biology of Conservation, Rangeland Management, Wildlife Management and Conservation, and PhD in Dryland Resources Management among others.
I note that Pathways Kenya will include a full concurrent training track for early career field staff here at Mount Kenya Safari Club. This capacity building training will provide a unique and valuable opportunity for African conservation and wildlife management practitioners to exchange ideas and build their human dimensions tool box.

I take this opportunity to encourage all the training participants to take time to learn from the fellow participants and instructors, and develop networks for future collaboration. We need each other for us to win the fight against global challenges of biodiversity loss, land degradation, among others.
We thank the CSU in collaboration with the University of Nairobi, for actualizing this great conference. This conference serves to strengthen a long collaboration that actually started about 50 years ago.

Thank you for choosing Kenya as the host country. We also recognize the support we have had from USAID which has now culminated in the UoN’s African Dryland Institute for Sustainability (ADIS) based at Kibwezi, in the dryland county of Makueni.

Finally, I take this opportunity, ladies and gentlemen, to wish you a productive engagement in these few days that
you will be here, and I look forward to the output of this conference.

After the conference, and especially for those visiting Kenya for the first time, please take time to enjoy our diverse culture, hospitable people, and beautiful heritage in our National parks and Game Reserves.

God bless you all.

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AND
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