

**REMARKS BY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL  
AFFAIRS AND TOURISM MEC, MR. MLUNGISI MVOKO, AT THE  
OCCASION OF FIELD RANGERS DAY**

**26 NOVEMBER 2021**

Greetings to ECPTA Board Members and Executives;

Our partners and stakeholders present here;

Senior government officials present;

A special greetings to our guests, the Field Rangers;

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

Programme Director, it's an honour and privilege for me to address an occasion of this nature, an occasion that celebrates the work done by our Field Rangers.

I feel more honored because, for me, their work is a story of human interest. This Field Ranger Day offers a chance to pay tribute to Rangers who risk their lives to protect nature and those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. It is also a day on which we as Government can say to Rangers, that their work and wellbeing matters to us.

They perform a number of critical roles such as ecological monitoring, fire-fighting, tour-guiding, environmental education and awareness, invasive species control and law enforcement.

The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified the challenges that these heroes and heroines had to confront as some opportunists took advantage of the lockdown restrictions to encroach on land adjacent to parks, commit environmental crimes such as illegal hunting, harvesting resources without the necessary permits, etc. The field rangers were at the coal-face, risking coming into contact with COVID-19 infected individuals.

It is a day on which we can re-affirm our assurance to them that we stand fully behind them and will continue to support them by building their capacity through training and equipping them with basic field gear.

As government we need to boost the morale of Rangers by showing them that their battle against poachers and other environmental crimes is not in vain. We want to tell you that we understand and fully appreciate the fact that poaching goes much deeper than mere physical security. Social and economic problems such as unemployment and poverty are part of the problem. In other words, it is a multi-dimensional problem that extends beyond provincial borders, countries and government departments.

A number of successful operations have been recorded as collaborative work done by law enforcement agencies ensured successful arrests and prosecutions. The multi-disciplinary investigative approach remains key in finalizing cases of illegal wildlife trade. Criminal elements within society are taking advantage of the socio-economic pressures and driving the demand for illegal wildlife products. However, working closely with communities adjacent to parks will bring a better and sustainable solution to wildlife management and ensure that benefits such as eco-tourism, ecosystem services and local economic growth are realized.

Our support will extend to men and women who are committed in executing their function in an honest manner. It will be naïve of us, ladies

and gentlemen, to deny the potential for bribery and corruption fuelled by large amounts of cash offered by poaching syndicates. These poaching syndicates are well organised and have the financial means to buy services of government officials. I am confident that the majority of our rangers are good honest men and women who are doing this job for the love of it. Without these unsung heroes and heroines there would be no conservation. They need our respect and proper support.

It is these men and women who are responsible for keeping our precious natural resources safe. You put your lives on the line every day to keep our rhino's, elephants and other species safe. On behalf of the Eastern Cape government, I want to thank each and every one of you, including your families. Without their support, you would not be able to work so selflessly.

Lastly, I want to re-emphasize the importance of community involvement in our conservation efforts. As communities we share the same space with our wildlife. Therefore, without community involvement, there will be no conservation.

I thank you.