

Nairobi, Thursday, July 23, 2020

BALALA/ UNODC DONATION

VISIT OUR NATIONAL PARKS, BALALA CALLS ON KENYANS

By Kennedy Waziri

Tourism and Wildlife Cabinet Secretary, Najib Balala, has called on Kenyans to take advantage of the reduced park entry fees and visit the national parks and enjoy Kenya's rich wildlife heritage, as a way of opening up the economy.

Balala encouraged Kenyans to start by themselves in supporting the tourism sector, in order to grow the economy and not to wait for international visitors.

The CS however, reminded everyone to strictly observe the Ministry of Health directives of wearing face masks, keeping social distance, and hand washing or sanitizing frequently to keep the COVID 19 pandemic at bay.

Balala said this today, when he received 15 motorbikes and 180 motor vehicle tyres, donated by the United Nations Office On Drugs and Crime (UNODC), at the Kenya Wildlife Service headquarters, Nairobi.

While receiving the donation, the CS thanked UNODC for the donation saying that it will go a long way in boosting operations in the country's national parks and reserves.

Balala said, the donation had come at a time when KWS and indeed the entire nation was grappling with adverse effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.

"The pandemic is crushing global economies. Countries as well as organizations are facing reduced revenues and cash flow challenges, making it difficult to purchase adequate provisions to use for routine operations". The CS said.

Siting Kenya Wildlife Service as an example, the CS said, KWS generates sh. 4.2billion from the national parks and reserves' gate entry fees per annum, but due to COVID 19 pandemic, this target will not be achieved this year.

Balala said, there was a quantum improvement in wildlife protection in the country, saying since January 2020, there has not been any single rhino poaching to date and that by May this year, there were 31 rhino 'babies'.

He said the government was in the process of preparing title deeds for all national parks and reserves in order to protect them from any further human encroachment.

The UNODC regional representative, Amado Philip De Andres, said it was important to protect wildlife since, about 6,500 species were victims of wildlife crime globally.

European ambassador to Kenya, Simon Mordue, promised the union's support to KWS saying, the two organizations have been partners for long.

He said, the post COVID 19 thinking should not be about recovering from where we are, but being able to create a better and sustainable environment.

The Principle Secretary, State Department for Wildlife, Professor Fred Segor, applauded the UNODC and the European Union for partnering with Kenya Wildlife Service in protecting wildlife for now and for posterity.

Those present included the Director General of KWS, Brig.(Rtd) John Waweru, and the UNODC Regional Co-ordinator, Container Control Programme and Wildlife Crime Programme, Javier Montano.

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