

## Opening Speech

HON. DR. Q. K. J. MASIRE, Vice-President of Botswana

Mr Chairman and participants in this Symposium, I bid you welcome. I welcome particularly those who have come to join us from outside Botswana; some from the continent of Africa, others from as far as Europe, America and New Zealand. We are much encouraged by your interest.

This is not the first time that people have been drawn from the far corners of the earth to our Okavango Delta; in fact, they come every week, but I believe it is the first occasion we have had a public Symposium on the subject.

In my job as Vice-President and Minister of Finance and Development Planning, I attend many meetings of politicians, many meetings of the public and many meetings of civil servants. But I also value my role as President of the Botswana Society with its somewhat different perspectives and different enthusiasms. It is particularly valuable when a voluntary society takes the initiative in organising a forum where professionals and amateurs, scientists and civil servants, critics and well-wishers, can join together in looking at a problem and in seeking for the truth.

In 1971 the Botswana Society organised a somewhat similar Symposium on the sustained use of the Kalahari. That Symposium resulted in a well-informed body of opinion in Botswana and, indeed, it has assisted the Government in formulating its Tribal Land Grazing Programme.

In the year following the Kalahari Symposium, the United Nations held, in Stockholm, a well-publicised conference on the Environment. Much attention was given to the dangers of the short-term exploitation of the resources of our planet, the dangers of pollution and the destruction of the environment. We appreciate these concerns and we are aware of the dangers. The Botswana Society has wisely chosen, first the Kalahari and now the Okavango Delta, as subjects for its Symposia.

The Kalahari, semi-arid and without streams and rivers, is very different from the Okavango Delta. Yet both are valuable natural resources and both can be sensitive to misuse. Both could be destroyed through ignorance, haste or greed. It is our privilege to use them, but it is our duty to conserve them for the future.

For the past sixty years people have been looking longingly at the Delta and making plans for its exploitation. Some of these plans took it for granted that the Delta would have to be changed completely in order to be of use. Mankind was exhilarated by his power to change the face of nature, and it was too often assumed that this was necessarily a good thing. Perhaps it is fortunate that no major engineering works have to date been constructed in the Delta. It is fortunate for the Botswana Society and for the Government that this Symposium is able to consider the Delta first as a God-given natural phenomenon, almost untouched by man.

Having evaluated it as it is, not only aesthetically, but also scientifically and economically, we are able to proceed to consider what should be its place in our new nation, economically poor but developing, with our four objectives of Rapid Economic Growth, Social Justice, Economic Independence and Sustained Production. We are dedicated to improving the lot of the people in the rural areas and we are dedicated to creating more employment for our people. But we intend to conserve our resources wisely and not to destroy them. Those of us who happen to live in the twentieth century are not more important than our descendants in centuries to come.

Since 1968, and more particularly since 1974, the Government, in association with UNDP and FAO, and with the assistance, among others, of Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Western Germany and the Netherlands, and also of De Beers and the Okavango Wildlife Society, the Government, as I say, has conducted detailed scientific studies of the ecology, hydrology, topography and human resources of the Delta. The increase in our knowledge since 1968 has been great. However, this knowledge has so far not been readily available to the ordinary person. Even scientists, if I may say so, have sometimes been so absorbed in their specialities that they have lacked a broad view of the other factors, which factors include, of course, economics and the aspirations of the people of Botswana.

The purpose of this Symposium is to disseminate the knowledge of the scientists, while they are still with us. Some of them are leaving at the end of this year, and we must not let them escape before we have had the chance to question them. I hope that in your discussions you will be able to avoid too detailed technicalities, and that your presentations will be in simple language, so that the critical issues may be clearly seen and freely discussed. I do not expect that you will necessarily reach agreement. I trust that you will reach understanding. I hope that you will be able to clarify the issues that should be faced by the people of Botswana.

I would like to thank the Botswana Society and all who have worked or subscribed towards this Symposium.