

**REMARKS BY PROF. PETER MSOLLA, MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE IYPE GLOBAL LAUNCH EVENT AT
UNESCO HQ, PARIS ON 12 FEBRUARY 2008.**

- Mr Chairperson,
 - Director General of UNESCO,
 - Distinguished Participants,
 - Excellencies,
 - Ladies and Gentlemen.
1. I feel greatly honoured to address this distinguished gathering as we celebrate the International Year of Planet Earth Global Launch Event. The International Year of Planet Earth which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through its Resolution 60/192 on 22nd December 2005 was made possible through the hard work and efforts of many individuals and institutions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who in one way or another played a critical role that led to the United Nations General Assembly proclaiming 2008 the International Year of Planet Earth.

2. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time and again, a lot has been said on the challenges facing planet Earth but little has been done to address these challenges which include demographic explosion, pollution and challenges due to the depletion of its finite resources, among others. It is an irrefutable fact that the Earth system to which the existence of humankind very much depends is subjected to variability caused by natural phenomena and man induced activities.

Africa like many parts of the world is not pollution free. Industrial activities, mining, farming systems and transport have contributed to the emissions of pollutants, toxic chemicals and hazardous substance into the Earth's system resulting into global warming and climatic change as a result of the depletion of the ozone layer. Our natural water systems have also increasingly become

scarce and leaving about half of all our population without clean and safe drinking water and thus posing serious health hazards to our people. As a result of the variability of the global weather pattern, in 2006 the East African region did experience the worst drought season which impacted negatively on the region's food security. Other human activities, which are also a cause for concern, are bad farming practices, which lead to deforestation and desertification. The challenge here is for Earth scientists in partnership with health professionals, environmental and social scientists, etc to help in raising public awareness and assist humankind from imminent dangers of self destruction.

3. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It may be recalled that on the 26th December, 2004 a catastrophe in the Indian Ocean region caused by the tsunami claimed over 200,000 lives and loss of valuable properties worth several millions of Dollars. This catastrophe which occurred several thousands miles away, it impacted on Tanzania's costal areas and resulted in loss of lives, mainly due to ignorance among the general public on the consequences of such a fateful event occurring elsewhere. On 5th December, 2005 a powerful earthquake measuring 6.8 on Richter scale struck at the Lake Tanganyika area and sent panic to various cities including Dar es Salaam. It toppled dozens of homes in Congo, burying children in the rubble. Several people were reported killed and several others injured and numerous houses were destroyed at the lake's shores. On 24th March, 2006 the volcano at Mt. Oldonyo Lengai in the Ngorongoro District erupted ferociously causing havoc to inhabitants of the area. The volcano erupted again in 2007 with much more force, thus necessitating my government to relocate neighbouring villagers to safe places. All the above examples point to the vulnerability of the Earth system and the eminent threat to life and property.

4. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main theme of the International Year of Planet Earth is Earth sciences for society. Through the implementation of the Year's activities the society should make meaningful gains through reduction of risks caused by natural and human induced hazards; reduction of health problems by improving understanding of the medical aspects of Earth Sciences; discovering new natural resources and making them available in a sustainable manner; building safer structures and expanding urban areas by utilizing natural surface conditions; determining the non-Human factor in climate change; enhancing understanding of the occurrence of natural resources so as to contribute to efforts of reducing political tensions; determining deep and poorly accessible ground water resources; improving understanding of the evolution of life; increasing interest in the Earth Sciences in society at large; and encouraging more young people to study Earth Sciences, among others.

It is gratifying to learn that, apart from Earth Scientists and researchers who are expected to benefit extensively under the Science programme by using their knowledge for the benefit of the World's population, the outreach programme of the International Year of Planet Earth would benefit, among others, decision makers and politicians and the general public by being better informed about knowledge in Earth Sciences and how it can be used for sustainable development and contribute to a better society and better living conditions. It is for the above reasons my government gave its full support to this initiative and went all the way from UNESCO Executive Board to the General Conference of UNESCO and the United Nations General Assembly to render its full support for the Year. I am grateful to the originators of the idea for having chosen Tanzania to lead the process. This is a great honour to my country. I do realize that to achieve the intended goals in a three year period is not a simple task. It requires commitment, cooperation of all stakeholders, well coordinated efforts, strategic plan, and political will, legal and good institutional frameworks. I have every confidence that the above tasks and goals will be accomplished as intended in a span of three years.

5. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the proclamation of the Year in 2005 by the United Nations General Assembly, my government took the challenge very seriously and started to plan for the Year. On 26th June 2006 in collaboration with UNESCO Dar es Salaam Cluster Office and UNDP, Tanzania held a one day National Symposium on the importance of the United Nations Proclaimed International Year of Planet Earth to Tanzania. During the Symposium participants were able to discuss pertinent issues on the ten themes of the International Year of Planet Earth, which are:

- Groundwater,
- Hazards,
- Earth and Health,
- Climate,
- Resources,
- Mega Cities,
- Deep earth,
- Oceans,
- Soils, and
- Earth and life.

In this way participants took stock of our own human activities impinging on planet Earth and carried out an in depth reflection of the challenges facing planet Earth in that part of the world and the role Tanzania could play in meeting these challenges. The participants examined shortcomings and identified opportunities and forward looking strategies with a view to overcoming the challenges. Finally the participants formed a National Committee, which I had the privilege of inaugurating on 27th March, 2007.

6. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its inception, the Tanzania National Committee for the International Year of Planet Earth has been working hard to put together the national scientific programme, bearing in mind the need for international cooperation. The

Committee has also been active in the implementation of the outreach programmes by sensitising the general public on the importance of the Year and its activities. In this connection, the Year's activities have been and continue to be popularised through TV, radio, newspapers, posters, printed T-Shirts, stickers, badges, brochures and fliers. Further, the National Committee has also been entrusted with the task of organising an African Regional Conference on the International Year of Planet Earth which will take place in Arusha, Tanzania from 8th – 9th May, 2008. The preparatory work for the Conference, to be attended by invited dignitaries including heads of state and government, former heads of state, politicians, decision and policy makers, representatives of international organisations, the private sector, students and scientists, is now in its final stages. The above event will mark the launch of the Year in the Africa region. There will be papers and poster presentations; exhibitions of both physical and literature material; and pre-and post conference excursions and tours to interesting geological sites in the country.

The main theme of the conference will be: ***Earth Sciences for the Benefit of Society and Sustainable Development in Africa***, which will address four key questions encompassing the ten main science themes of the International Year of Planet Earth, namely:

- ***Health and human well-being;***
- ***Sustainable use of resources;***
- ***Natural and human induced hazards and disasters and***
- ***Science education.***

Information on this Conference has been posted on the IYPE Website at www.yearofplanetearth.org. May I therefore take this opportunity on behalf of the government of the United Republic of Tanzania and on my own behalf to invite you all to Arusha, Tanzania, the land of Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar. I shall be happy to welcome you personally when you arrive in the

country. I sincerely hope you will make it to Arusha in order to share with us the African Launch of the Year.

7. Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Organisers of the International Year of Planet Earth Global Launch Event, which include UNESCO and the International Union of Geological Sciences for having invited me to take part and for the warm welcome and in deed for granting me the opportunity to make a few remarks before this distinguished gathering. I would also like to thank the twelve founding partners and 26 associated partners, sponsors and donors of this joint initiative. I confess, knowledge on geosciences is of prime importance. If it is made available to politicians, policy and decision makers and the general public it can contribute to sustainable living and development on planet Earth. While the Year's activities span from 2007 – 2009 with its climax in 2008, it is my belief that the lessons learnt in these three years will be used to set in place a permanent mechanism that would guarantee a continuity of actions leading to sustainable protection of the Earth system and all life forms in the interest of present and future generations. I wish the IYPE Global Launch Event fruitful deliberations.

= I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION =