



### **Sydney Kawadza Assistant News Editor**

GOVERNMENT appears divided over the issuance of leases to indigenous operators in

the Save Valley Conservancy. Environment and Natural Resources Management Minister Francis Nhema yesterday said issuing leases was part of the wildlife-based land reform programme.

But his Tourism and Hospitality Industry counterpart Walter Mzembe differs. He said the move threatened Zimbabwe's chances of successfully hosting next year's United Nations World Tourism Organisation General Assembly.

The new operators received the leases in 2007 and started issuing hunting permits to interested hunters recently.

Minister Nhema said a meeting chaired by Vice-President John Nkomo (then Special Affairs Minister in the President's Office responsible for Land, Land Reforms and Resettlement) resolved that indigenous people partner the white operators.

"This was done since the days of the then governors Josiah Hungwe, Willard Chiwewe and subsequently the current Governor and Resident Minister Titus Maluleke," he said.

"Several meetings were held between the governors and conservancy members who agreed on the criteria for partnerships."

Minister Nhema said the new partners have been frustrated by efforts made to deny them access to the conservancy.

"Conservancy members are offering 30 percent shares to their partners and have continued with hunting activities after they asked for continued discussions which we agreed to," he said.

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- [Storm brews between Parks, Save Conservancy](#)
  
- [Issuing of hunting permits to black farmers spot on](#)
  
- [Indigenisation of conservancies starts](#)

“Government is issuing new partners with leases although conservancy members retain the right to choose their partners.”

Minister Nhema said problems in the conservancy had no effect or bearing on the UNWTO General Assembly.

But Minister Mzembi said the take-over of the farms would be detrimental to tourism growth in Zimbabwe.

He urged the Presidency and Cabinet to urgently deal with the matter.

“It is a unilateral action from the line ministry concerned and it's implementing agency, National Parks,” said Minister Mzembi.

“To the best of my knowledge, in the life of the current Government, no such policy as Wildlife-Based Land Reform and Empowerment has been tabled in Cabinet.”

He said the policy was still in “draft” form.

“If what is happening in the conservancies is the outcome of the policy as conceived by the Environment Ministry, then it is obviously a very regressive instrument,” said Minister Mzembi.

“It promotes greed and alienation of our masses who are the legitimate broad-based empowerment partners in community share ownership and empowerment trusts as currently being applied in the mining sector. This business of empowering people who are already empowered severally in other sectors, such as farming, ranching, sugar cane farming, mining, etc, will not pass the moral test nor will it endear us to the people except to ourselves.”

Minister Mzembi said the imposition of partners on the conservancy was against Zimbabwe's laws.

"It is wrong to have minority ownership of conservancies, but it is even more unpardonable to replace that minority white with a minority black, in the face of a crisis of expectations and thirst for empowerment from our black majority," said Minister Mzembi

"Environment (ministry) are the custodians, and our mandate is to market, and we can only market value not a threat. Wildlife management and conservation are also investment and philanthropic areas, in some instances protected by BIPAS, which are a sincerity test of trade goodwill between nation states."

Members of the Save Valley Conservancy said in a statement that they had long held the view that indigenisation should take the form of community involvement and benefit.

"To this end (we) formed and finalised the Save Valley Conservancy Community Trust, incorporating five neighbouring rural district councils," they said. They blamed lack of progress on the Government and the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management "to bring in specific and long-term designated individuals".

The Save Valley Conservancy was formed in 1991 with the approval of the Government through the national parks with the assistance of WWF and Beit Trust.