



water & sanitation

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Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

Wastewater can rescue the world from its water challenges

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Wastewater management became a focal point of debate among delegates at the World Water Day Summit and Expo in Durban last week. Potable water is dwindling fast while the world is faced with a serious challenge of population explosion.

It emerged that water is fast becoming a treasured natural resource the world over and its scarcity is posing a serious threat to world peace. If government do not address the challenge it may simply lead to the much-vaunted Third World War.

The Minister of Water and Sanitation, Ms Nomvula Mokonyane warned last week that Israel was using the precious resource as a weapon against the hapless Palestine in the Middle East.

President Jacob Zuma opened a three-day historic summit at Inkosi Albert Luthuli ICC which was attended by international think-tankers of water, among them United Nations representatives and the President of the World Bank Group, Dr Jim Yong Kim.

President Zuma set the scene for a vigorous debate during his address warned that the 'bleak' 2017 World Water Development Report required world leaders to urgently prioritise the improvement of access to potable water and sanitation services. The report, he said, should draw attention to the current dismal global status of water and sanitation and to inspire commitment to an urgent call to action by world leaders to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

His warning comes the wake of the United Nations decision in 2011 that member states must meet their socio-economic challenges by delivering basic services through the Sustainable Development Goals.

These statistics do not do justice in conveying the development and health challenges faced by so many people, or in contextualising how unevenly these basic services are distributed around the world and within societies. For example, Zuma continued, it was reported that in 2011 nearly 60 per cent of the world's one billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries. It seems that little has changed since that year.

The question arises therefore that, why are governments - despite repeated warnings by experts - putting water at the bottom of their priorities as an insignificant part of socio-economic development?

It is for this reason that at the summit the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW), signed a declaration that commits them to the prioritisation of water.

The declaration read: "We, the High Level Panel on Water (HLPW), African Ministers Council on Water, "Encourage the development and deployment of public awareness and education campaigns for civil society, businesses and government representatives around water quality, sanitation, gender and health". The Durban Political Declaration agreed by all Political leaders



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mirror the key principles, pillars and vision of the African Union, AMCOW, and HLPW Action Plan in support of the implementation of the SDGs. The Political Declaration seeks to encourage the acceleration plans and programmes and commit to the rollout of the Action Plan initiative.”

Water has been transformed into constitutional matter that guarantees every citizen the right of unhindered access to water and decent sanitation. Through the National Water Act of 1998, the Department of Water and Sanitation seeks to address the deficiencies of the past on all matters that are related to water. Through the Water Act of 1956 the apartheid government deliberately and willingly excluded black rural communities the right of access to water and decent sanitation. Consequently, the post-1994 government inherited a legacy of between 12 – 14 million South Africans in rural areas who were deprived of their right to drinking water and decent sanitation.

The hapless communities in 14 000 villages around the country, watched helplessly as water was reticulated to white farmers for agricultural purposes while they (blacks) contended with sharing untreated water with animals.

However, President Zuma thought it was not all doom and gloom as Africa has a potential to create new and more positive economic developmental opportunities through among others, water infrastructure investment, valuing water, catalyzing change, building partnerships and international co-operation, as well as creating better human settlements and data.

Until the peoples of the world start saving water in earnest, the much-vaunted Third World War may come sooner than anticipated and we will all be doomed.

Themba Khumalo