

**African Development Bank First Water Week**  
**Response by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Presentation of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative; African Water Facility &**  
**European Water Initiative**  
**Tunis**  
**1 July 2004**

President of the ADB, Mr Kabbaj, all Ministers present here, ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour for me to participate in this groundbreaking event whose theme is "Building Partnerships for Water in Africa" for all our people. We are here to express our commitment to the poor masses of our continent. But more than that we are here to affirm the dignity of all Africans.

We must welcome developments, which increase support for the delivery of water supply and sanitation to the poor communities of our continent.

We all know that there is no way in which we will achieve the Millennium Development Goals to which our heads of state have committed themselves if we do not make more resources available for the purpose.

It is also important that we do this in a systematic way. And we must do it in a way, which makes it easier, not more difficult for the implementers to work, whether they are national governments, local governments, public utilities, or community based organisations.

All this is reflected in the collection of initiatives, which have been presented to us. Certainly, I understand that we are already seeing progress on regional water management initiatives in West Africa that have been stalled up to now because previous funding procedures were simply too complicated.

But I am concerned that we should not forget some other crucial principles.

One principle is that we must not engage in permanent capacity building, which never leads to anything. In this regard, the approach of "learning by doing" is important and we must see it reflected in our programmes; investment funds must be made available in parallel with capacity building initiatives.

There is also the contentious question of the involvement of private sector in water services. My government has consistently supported the idea that the private sector can contribute to the achievement of water services goals, particularly by providing services to "economic" consumers. But we have also been clear that this must be done under public leadership. It must also be done in a way, which recognises the principle that social needs must be given priority in the provision of water services.

Public leadership in African countries cannot be given if choices are made on its behalf. So I trust that the principles of public choice and the priority of meeting basic needs are fully reflected in the design of the programmes. The issue that has been raised about our contribution should be looked into and taking into consideration the motivations for and against.

If that is done, I have no doubt that these initiatives will represent a substantial contribution to meeting our common goals and congratulate all those concerned for the important progress that they have made.

Thank you.