

**Address at the Tree Planting event at Total South Africa – on the eve of the
launch of Arbor Week
Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
27 August 2004**

Mr Jordan, Chief Executive Officer of TOTAL South Africa
Members of the general management of TOTAL
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a great honour for me to be here with you today. Firstly, I want to note with appreciation the many successful years of partnership that our Department has had with Total South Africa. I can, with confidence say on behalf of our Department that the last ten years of our new dispensation in South Africa has provided all of us with an opportunity to learn from one another, to exchange views and to share experiences.

Ladies and gentlemen, fifteen years of relationship is the longest public-private partnership that I am aware of. But what is important in that time is that we have jointly achieved much in meeting the objectives that my department has set for Arbor Week. Total South Africa has been an integral part of realising the broader policy objectives as set out in the Reconstruction and Development programme.

We have made strides in meeting the basic needs and providing clean, running water to about 9 million people of South Africa bears testimony to this. We have much more that we can cite towards meeting the basic needs of South African people – in Health, Electricity, in Education, in Sport and all other areas of social transformation and governance.

We have to a greater extent democratised the state and the society, successfully implementing our programme of nation building. We have to be proud as South Africans especially when the world looks at ours as a miraculous experience. Miraculous as it may seem to the outside world, we know that it is through our collective effort as South Africans that we managed to create a nation where all will live side-by-side as South Africans, building a sustainable nation and society for the future generation.

Much as we have achieved in the last ten years we still face challenges to consolidate our gains and deepen our democracy. The focus of our second decade of democracy especially as reflected in the State of the Nation Address of the President in February this year, is that we need to continue to build our “first economy” to be able to contribute towards strengthening the “second economy”.

In the area of forestry one of the programmes that we have is “Community Forestry” which according to the White Paper on Sustainable Development in South Africa “it is designed and applied to meet local social, households and environmental needs and to favour local economic development. This is a programme that is implemented by or with the participation of communities. It is part of the concept of Participatory Forest Management (PFM), which is based on integrated approach to governance and development. This particular approach supports other policy developments on local economic development such as the protection and management of natural resources and biological diversity and forest enterprise development, among other things.

Mr CEO, looking around your building, it is stimulating to see how you have incorporated trees and water into the design of your building. Communities could learn a lot from this concept, which has not only created a harmonious and beautiful environment but has created a healthy, habitable environment, which is every citizen’s constitutional right in this country.

Programme Director, government has identified the problem of skills shortage in our country. However, the most urgent challenge is that of our country seriously lacking scarce skills. I personally have a challenge because the Department I am deployed in needs such skills for it to carry out its mandate. Hence government has identified Human resources development as another huge challenge especially in responding to the call of sustainable development. Human Resources development is also an important factor in consolidating and deepening our democracy.

The seriousness and the commitment of government to the issue of Human Resources development was demonstrated in 2002 with the adoption of the National Research and Development Strategy, among other things. The Strategy seeks to address the huge gap we have in the area of scarce skills, with an emphasis in Science and Technology.

South Africa is said to have “a world-class forestry-research infrastructure and personnel, with almost 2% of the forestry industry turnover, from both public and private sectors, devoted to research”.

It is our responsibility, both government and the private sector in the form of our oil companies like Total, academic institutions and others to encourage this career direction for our youth. Maybe Forestry needs a career guide like the water sector has already started giving a career direction to motivate the youth, through the Water Research Commission. We need to channel the career paths to the scarce but much needed areas of socio-economic development – Careers in Water and Forestry.

Although I have been with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry for a short time, I am very aware of the important role that TOTAL has played in supporting the department with its efforts to promote greening especially during the Arbor Week.

We can only thank you to have been involved since 1989 not only in giving out funds but also in being directly hands-on in the processes to establish projects that have assisted with job creation like the establishment of community tree nurseries; the development of community vegetable gardens that have helped to provide food for people in disadvantaged areas; the greening of schools and many others.

Mr Jordan, ladies and gentlemen, I trust that this partnership will continue for many years to come. And in this year that Total is celebrating its 50th anniversary, we wish TOTAL many more years of life. May you have a proudly South African anniversary that is celebrated within the spirit of our ten years of democracy. Most importantly, may you have many more years of being part of the South African business community. May the people of our beautiful rainbow country be able to continue to share in your successes.

Lastly I would like to thank Total South Africa and its staff for choosing the month of August, the South African Women's month, for today's tree planting event and for your 50th celebrations. This month of August we look back with pride as women “Celebrating our 10 years of freedom, as women building a better South Africa and a better World”.

The attainment and the success of our democracy is but the best monument we could ever build to mark and honour the contribution of women of South Africa towards the society which we are all proud of being its citizens today.

I THANK YOU.