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WATER SECURITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES - A PEOPLE CENTRED APPROACH

Honourable Ministers of Water

Distinguished guests

Dear friends in water and sanitation from all over the world.

It is indeed an honour for me as an African Minister of Water to join hands with you today to discuss taking a people centred approach to water security in developing countries.

This topic is particularly dear to my heart because of the approach taken by the Government of South Africa in this regard, not only in the field of water, but across the board in terms of delivery by government to our people. We have captured this approach in the concept of Batho Pele, or People First. This is the concept within which we provide services to all the people in South Africa.

It is a particularly important concept in the South African context, because, under the oppression of apartheid, the majority of South Africans were discarded, disregarded, and deprived of their basic human rights. As a result, many of our people are extremely poor, lacking in access to basic services and very dependent on the services offered by Government.

This picture is, of course, complicated by the fact that we are a water scarce country. Overall, South Africa comes far down the list of water availability per capita. And like many other countries, we are experiencing the impacts of global climate change, with increased variations in rainfall and extreme events. As a country already prone to droughts and floods this scenario remains extremely worrying, and one that threatens the water security of our nation.

It is worth taking a few minutes to dwell on what we understand by water security, and I would like to highlight two key elements. The first is probably the element that many of us are aware of – the issue of national level water security – is there sufficient water, of sufficient quality, to meet the economic and social needs of the country sustainably? I will come back to this issue in due course, because this question has important implications for many developing countries, particularly in Africa.

At the other end of the scale, however, is water security at the household level – does the household have sufficient and affordable water, of an appropriate quality, to meet their daily requirements?

This is also a question that has enormous implications for developing countries, both in relation to water for domestic purposes, but also in relation to water for productive purposes.

At this point, I would like to stress, that when we put people first, we need to consider which people we are putting "first-first", and which might perhaps be coming "second-first". We would be foolish to pretend that the term "people" refers to a homogenous and equally advantaged group of human beings. Society is stratified by many factors – race, class, gender, religion, to name but a few. The reality in South Africa, for example, is that society continues to be stratified according to race, class, gender and religion, to name but a few. These factors will more likely than not, determine access to services and the ability to pay for improved services.

If we are to consider a people-centred approach, we should, as governments, be foregrounding the needs of the poor, the marginalized, the voiceless, the weak, the vulnerable. It is our duty to ensure that the weakest are given the strongest protection. It is our duty to ensure that our water management is designed to enable the poor to rise out of poverty. It is our duty to ensure that our water management not only does not discriminate against poor, rural women, but actively allows them to participate and to benefit. My dream is not only of "people centred water security", but of "people centred, pro-poor water security".

Let me further add, that we need to view the challenge of people centred water security within the framework provided by the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Programme of Action Targets.

In particular, we need to consider the challenges of:

- Halving the proportion of people without access to water and sanitation by 2015;
- halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015; and
- all countries having integrated water resources management plans in place by the end of this year.

Provision of reliable water supplies for economic and social development is crucial to meeting the Millennium Development Goal on poverty. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, there is not sufficient infrastructure to

provide this reliable supply. And this applies particularly to my home continent, Africa. Africa is the least developed continent on the globe with respect to water resource infrastructure. This simple statement can be illustrated by the following facts:

- In North America, the quantity of water storage per person is 6 150 cubic metre (m³).
- in South Africa, the best-developed country in Africa, the quantity of water storage per person is only 746 m³.
- in Ethiopia, a country with large potential, the quantity of water storage per person is only 43 m³.

In spite of a few large rivers in Africa like the Congo and the Nile, 21 of the world's most arid countries, in terms of water per person, are located in Africa. In arid and semi-arid countries, rivers only flow for short periods in the rainy seasons and you need dams to store water for the dry periods. The need for the development of water resource infrastructure in Africa is clear. The same arguments are also applicable to many other countries in the developing world. The types of water infrastructure needed in Africa, and in many developing countries, include:

- Large dams to store rainfall from good years for use during dry spells;
- interbasin transfer schemes to transfer water from wet areas to drier areas;
- abstraction works, pump stations, pipelines and canals to take water from rivers and dams to places where water is needed;
- infrastructure for water services reticulation to cities and rural areas;
- dykes and other flood protection works to protect low-lying communities from floods;
- infrastructure to generate power;
- purification works to deliver potable water for human consumption, including desalination plants in very dry areas; and
- waste water treatment works to re-use waste water and to maintain water quality.

At the household level, we need to promote appropriate technologies, such as rainwater harvesting that can contribute to the water security of individual families and communities.

I must stress Africa's climate variability and the impact of global climate change, as a major reason underlying the need for water storage infrastructure. Obviously, surface water is not the only source of water and we would do well not to forget what lies beneath the ground. Groundwater can be an important source of water and, where available, can often be harnessed more cheaply than surface water.

Africa does not only need water infrastructure. Africa needs the economic development that will provide sustainable quality jobs. The role of water is crucial in poverty eradication, and in social and economic development. Without clean water and sanitation, our communities will remain in the prison of unhealthy living conditions, malnutrition and diseases. Access to water for irrigation farming can turn a small piece of land into an economic farming unit. Water supply and sanitation services are the backbone of thriving towns and cities. Industrial and mining development cannot take place without water. Power generation cannot take place without large volumes of water for cooling or for hydropower. Indeed, water infrastructure development is a precondition for economic development.

The same backlog position is true with respect to hydropower development in Africa. Europe and North America have already developed more than 60 % of their hydropower potential, while Africa has developed less than 5 % of its potential.

The potential for hydropower from the higher rainfall countries north of South Africa is virtually unlimited and only constrained by political instability, financial resources and environmental concerns, which can all be resolved.

Hydropower is a relative clean form of energy compared to coal, oil and nuclear energy. However, hydropower development, like all infrastructure development, impacts on people and the environment and these impacts must be managed. There are beneficial impacts, and negative impacts, and the challenge is to enhance the former and reduce the latter. The impacts of storage dams, which are associated with most hydro power stations, have been well documented in the report by the World Commission on Dams. There are two particular concerns that we need to face in relation to the construction of storage dams – the first is that the people affected by a dam should be guaranteed benefits of some nature from the dam. They should be better off after the construction of the dam than they were before.

The second is that the impacts on aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems should be mitigated. However, it is important to stress that, in the interests of people-centered water security, we cannot let an over-emphasis on environmental concerns trap our people in poverty, ill-health and under-development.

The hydropower potential of Africa has huge development benefits. The Congo River's huge potential for hydro-electric power could play an important role in providing power regionally to Central and Southern Africa. The

proposed Grand Inga Hydropower Project on the Congo River will be the biggest engineering project in Africa since the construction of the Suez Canal.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries can offset their carbon emissions at home by clean energy schemes in developing countries. It is my firm belief that hydropower development in Africa should qualify for this. It is also worth noting that affordable energy is also a prerequisite for economic development, and this hydropower potential could make enormous contributions to the economic development of the region.

The progress that is currently being made towards peace and the democratisation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can unlock the hydropower potential of the Congo River and this can be the key to unlock the economic potential of the whole Africa continent.

Let me mention that the African Ministers' Council on Water and NEPAD are in a process to identify high priority regional water projects, which can be aligned to the goals of NEPAD of poverty alleviation, economic development and regional integration. These projects will support the sustainable development programmes of Africa, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation targets.

In order to facilitate this, we have selected the African Development Bank as the institution to manage NEPAD's infrastructure programme and to host the African Water Facility. None the less, the African Water Facility requires increased donor funding in line with the leadership given by the Commission of Sustainable Development and the Economic Commission for Africa, in order to assist African countries to deliver on their targets.

In this regard, it is also crucial that donor and credit funding are targeted at infrastructure development and not only for capacity building. 2005 is the target for all countries to have Integrated Water Resource Management plans in place. It is crucial that these plans deal not only with institutional and legislative reform, but also with the provision of infrastructure, from large dams through to Ventilated Improved Pit toilets. Without the provision of infrastructure, those plans will remain pipe-dreams – or perhaps "non-pipe-dreams" since it is the actual pipes in the ground that we need so badly.

At the same time, we need to adopt a "learning by doing" approach by addressing soft issues, like capacity building at the same time as the hard issues, like infrastructure development, in line with the theme of this Stockholm Water Week.

South Africa has already achieved the 2005 target to develop an integrated water resource management strategy and efficiency plan (National Water Resources Strategy of South Africa). South Africa is also well ahead on meeting the water and sanitation targets. We realise, however, the difficulty for many other developing countries in Africa and elsewhere to achieve the targets of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals.

International support has tended to focus more on soft issues, such as capacity building and governance and not sufficiently on the hard issues of infrastructure development. Water supply and sanitation services need large amounts of money to build water treatment works for potable water supply, pipelines and pumping stations to distribute the water, wastewater treatment works and sewerage collection systems. Poor communities can hardly pay for the operation and maintenance of these systems and rely on government grants or donor funding to finance the capital costs. Without significant financial resources becoming available for infrastructure, there is no way that the Millennium Development Goals in water supply and sanitation will be achieved in many countries.

In this regard I wish to repeat the Secretary General of the United Nations' plea at the 13th Session of the United Nations' Commission on Sustainable Development, that developed countries should agree to a target to achieve the contribution of 0,7% of GNP to Overseas Development Assistance to developing countries.

I would like to call on the international community to support the African Ministers' Council on Water in its efforts to identify the water priorities of Africa and to address it. The African Ministers' Council on Water promote water and sanitation initiatives in Africa in line with the objectives of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

A major achievement of the African Ministers' Council on Water is the establishment of the African Water Facility, which will be discussed in more detail in some of our deliberations here. The African Water Facility is seen as a mechanism created by Africans to kick-start infrastructure development for water supply and sanitation development in Africa.

It is appreciated that many other financial mechanisms will also be involved, such as the European Union Water Initiative, the G8 Water Initiative, initiatives of other countries of the developed world, such as the Commission for Africa, the World Bank and from the private sectors, working within the policies, strategies and priorities that Africa has determined for itself. All these initiatives must be co-ordinated under the leadership of the African Ministers'

Council on Water and the New Partnership for Africa's Development and supported by the African Water Facility. The Regional Economic Communities of Africa must all play a role in this co-ordination.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me remind you that water security is not an end in itself. The achievement of water security, at the national and household level, is important to ensure that the people of the world can live with dignity; that the children of the world can reach their full potential; that the women of the world can spend their time productively as full members of society.

Finally, I must say a few words about gender mainstreaming in water resource management. Gender mainstreaming should be an essential part of our water resource management policies, and thus also part and parcel of water resource development projects.

Why is gender so important in the water sector? We need to recognize that gender disparities arise because of ideological, political, economic and socio-cultural systems that favour men and boys at the expense of women and girls. In South Africa, aspects of these systems are still around us, despite the many advances we have made since 1994.

These gender disparities affect the achievement of human rights, the distribution of resources, wealth and other means of production, the sexual division of work and responsibilities, the ability to participate in decision-making and political power and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements.

In most cultures, women are primarily responsible for the use and management of water resources, sanitation and health at the household level. Over the years, women have accumulated an impressive store of environmental wisdom, being the ones to find water, to educate children in hygiene matters and to understand the impact of poor sanitation on health. At the same time, women and girls are often obliged to walk many hours of every day fetching water, while men are rarely expected to perform such tasks.

Yet, all too often, decisions about the design and location of water facilities are made without the involvement of the female users, who have most at stake in this regard. Despite their number and their prominent roles and responsibilities in relation to water and sanitation, women often have no voice and no choice in decisions about the kind of services they need or are receiving.

Ensuring equal opportunities to women, girls, men and boys at all levels and in all spheres requires us to acknowledge the gender disparities and to take positive measures to bridge the gender gaps.

Women represent the great majority of the poor in Africa. If we wish to eradicate poverty, we must empower women and ensure that they have the necessary resources, including water. Poverty eradication and gender equality are very closely intertwined. Nowhere does this apply more than in the water sector.

We should also remember that women farmers are as productive as their male counterparts, but that a higher proportion of female income is spent on family well being relative to male income. Empowering women and ensuring their access to water is good for the women, good for the family and good for society.

From Africa we are proud to report that an Action Plan to Mainstream Gender in Africa's Water Policies, Programmes and Projects for the next 10 years, 2005 to 2015, has been developed jointly by UN-Water/Africa, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and endorsed by the Executive Committee of the African Minister' Council on Water in 2005.

Gender mainstreaming is not about women only; it is about women and men, young and old, everyone working together, towards a common goal.

I thank you.

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