

**Handing over ceremony of the *Baswa Le Meetse* Awards prizes**  
**Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Mammutla Primary School, Mammutla Village, Taung, North West**  
22 September 2006

Programme Director  
Honourable MEC and Members of the Provincial Legislature  
Honourable Mayors  
Councillors  
Principals  
Educators and Learners  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Dumelang

### **1. Introduction**

It is an honour to be here today to celebrate the achievements of our youth and to recognise how far we have come as a country in just a few years of democracy. This year we commemorate the 30 year anniversary of the 1976 uprising and thereby recognise the important role of youth at the forefront of change in society.

In 1976, the youth of this country took to the streets in protest against Bantu Education— an education system that denied black people quality education and was established to limit the potential of our people. As a young person becoming active in politics during those turbulent times, I refused to allow the Apartheid State to hold me back, and limit my potential.

Gallant fighters lay down their lives in order for us to enjoy the fruits of democracy, and it is important for us to remind the youth of today of the struggle for democracy.

Today the challenges for the youth are different - it is no longer about the poor education system, because with democracy in 1994, the ANC government recognised the importance of education as a means to give the youth a better future; rather the struggle for the youth today is about the reconstruction of our society and creating a better life for all. Ladies and gentlemen, just because we have a democracy and a government that cares for its people does not mean that we will be able to overcome the injustices of the past in such a short period. We need the contribution of all our citizens, but especially the youth, in changing our society. Our education system today creates the opportunities for the youth to again be at the forefront of change in South Africa and to use their skills and knowledge to improve our country. They need to seize these opportunities.

'Halala Youth, Halala'

### **2. Youth in Water**

Programme Director, there are different ways for people to contribute towards the positive transformation of our country; and my department, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has recognised that by increasing the involvement of youth in water and sanitation issues we are able to make an impact not only in improving the lives of young people but also their communities.

We have as a result embarked on a youth development programme, which we are calling the 2020 Vision Programme. This programme targets youth in schools and exposes learners to practical projects that will enable them to identify water and sanitation problems in their schools and communities, and to embark on action to solve them. Through this programme we are educating both learners and the broader community about water and sanitation so they are able to help manage this scarce resource and can learn more about the benefits of hygiene.

As part of this programme we run the Youth Water Prize, and this years winners competed in Sweden against 27 other nations. I was impressed with the project of our national team, which comprised three young girls from a school in rural KwaZulu-Natal. They used their knowledge of water and science to find useful ways of turning the household waste water (grey water) into productive water that could be used to effectively grow plants and vegetables.

Our collaboration with the Department of Education on these projects has been excellent and we look forward to growing this relationship, and for us to provide resource materials to educators that will enable them to teach water and sanitation activities in the classroom. The benefits of this 2020 Vision Programme is that from an early age our children will learn the values of natural resource management and water management – and given the waste we see, a lesson many adults still have not learnt.

One of the projects of our 2020 Vision programme is the *Baswa le Meetse* Awards, the reason we are here today. *Baswa le Meetse* links water and sanitation, with arts and culture by encouraging students to showcase our cultural heritage while respecting our natural resources. The Grade 6 learners convey health and hygiene messages through drama, music, poetry, praise singing and poster development. Their projects are guided by the theme “Washing of Hands, Caring of Sanitation Facilities for Healthy Life”.

By using arts and culture I believe we are preserving one of the traditions that make us a great nation. The Awards take us to the roots of our heritage in the performing arts. This month we are celebrating Heritage Day on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, a public holiday created for us to recognise the different aspects of our heritage and culture such as our creative expression, our historical inheritance, our languages, the food we eat as well as the land in which we live. Indeed by celebrating the different aspects of our heritage we are able to build a nation that is united and is able to move forward in creating a better South Africa.

We are renowned praise singers, storytellers, actors and performers. Our abilities have been demonstrated in the physical renditions of choral music and stage plays. Our nation is hitting the world stage and today we see as the seeds of our strength displayed by our youth. And I look forward to being entertained through spectacular performances with captivating and educating messages by aspirant actors, poets and artists of our country.

### **3. Benefits of the Programme**

Ladies and gentlemen, through these youth projects and the increased awareness that is being created we are hoping that there is greater participation by the community members and the youth in water resource management, in hygiene programmes, in water conservation, in our initiatives to reallocate water, and in the identification of water and sanitation related problems in schools and communities.

Furthermore we hope to stimulate the interest of youth in water resource management careers as there are a number of opportunities in this field, and it is an area that has been identified as having scarce skills especially as many of the existing professionals are nearing retirement age. I would therefore like to see greater numbers of girls studying science and mathematics so that they too have the opportunity to enter this exciting field by becoming engineers and scientists.

My Department is looking at encouraging youth to take up science and mathematics by showing them the opportunities that exist in these fields but also by providing schools with resources such as laboratories and computers. In addition my department has made a commitment to supporting learners that wish to pursue careers in Water, Sanitation and Forestry and we will track successful learners from Grade 6 so that by the time they enter Higher Education – they can be awarded bursaries, if they qualify.

### **4. Sustainable Water Resources**

Ladies and Gentlemen, the reality is that our country is a water-scarce country, and as the Government Department responsible for our water resources we need to create awareness about the problems of inefficient uses of water and the damage done to our water resources as a result of pollution.

The vision of sustaining our resources will be realised only if our society is empowered with knowledge and skills that will enable them to use water efficiently; to protect it; to practise good hygiene for healthy lives; and to be aware of alien invasive plants and trees that consume too much water. As Government, we are committed to the democratisation of the management of water resources, and the participation of our communities as stakeholders is very crucial.

## **5. Conclusion**

To conclude ladies and gentlemen, I see the youth who have participated in *Baswa le Meetse* as our ambassadors who will assist us in taking forward very important messages to their communities.

We have also been fortunate that private sector companies, such as MTN, have been collaborating with us, and have provided resources such as laboratories, computers to schools; and have committed themselves to sponsoring media classrooms for the lifespan of the *Baswa le Meetse* Award project. These media classrooms will enable learners from both rural and urban schools to access information, conduct research and interact with other learners internationally. It will give learners the opportunity to excel in their studies and become the leaders of tomorrow.

This partnership between different spheres of government, the private sector and communities shows what it takes to become a winning nation. I challenge others to follow this good example.

From what we have seen today you can see the benefits of your support and how greatly it is valued by the many young people who have had an opportunity to display their talents and are finding recognition and acknowledgement from their peers and from us. These contributions will ensure that our nation develops; that our youth are empowered to achieve their potential; and that our environment is preserved – for both present and future generations.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the organisers and participants in Baswa Le Meetse and organisers of today's event – the staff of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and MTN. I appreciate the hard work they have put in. I would also like to thank the other partners in this project - the principals, teachers, parents and community members that supported these learners.

I ask you to give them a round of applause.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for attending this event and for joining us from across the country, as we hand over the media classrooms to this year's National *Baswa le Meetse* Award winners. These winners were announced by the Deputy President, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and my predecessor, Minister Buyelwa Sonjica, earlier this year; and they are from schools in KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and North West. The winners are the national champions and they carry their titles with pride. "Umntwana libhongo neqhayiya lesizwe, isizwe esisiso sibonwa ngokuvuyisana nempumelelo yabantwana".

***I thank you! Ke a leboga***