

Limpopo Arbor City Awards Prize Giving Event
Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Ga-Seleka Village, Lephalale
10 November 2006

Premier
MEC: Local Government and Housing
Mayor of Lephalale
President of the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management
Representatives from TOTAL SA, Malanseuns and Professional Irrigation Agencies
Community of Ga-Seleka
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

It is my pleasure to be with you this morning; I am very delighted to be visiting Limpopo again. Today we are celebrating and honouring winners of the 2006 Arbor City Awards, the Lephalale Municipality, for the excellent work they are doing in their greening initiatives.

There are people who might question why it is necessary for us to have greening initiatives and spend resources on trees and beautifying the environment when there is so much poverty and unemployment in our country. In responding to these questions we need to recognise that not only do trees and forests create enormous economic benefits and employment opportunities but by beautifying the environment they play an important role in restoring dignity to our people.

In rural areas the wood from trees can be used for fuel, or to make furniture or paper and create other jobs. Trees are also important for the soil and provide wind breaks, and as you know many people in our country use trees for medicinal purposes.

In urban areas trees help make our cities and towns more liveable and beautiful; and are essential for healthy and sustainable urban settlements. There are benefits to what we call 'Urban Greening' and they include the social benefits of improving health, creating opportunities for employment, being a source of recreation and education, and adding to community pride.

South Africa's apartheid history has left our townships without many trees. Townships back then were seen as temporary locations that did not receive sufficient investments in infrastructure and services. Democracy has resulted in greater investments into these areas so that they can become suburbs, with proper services and amenities, and importantly green spaces and parks. By planting a tree we are saying that we are here, we are investing in our own community, and we are growing our future and beautifying our areas. Greening our municipalities is contributing towards restoring dignity to our people and building a country that cares for its people.

2. The 16 Days Campaign for Activism to end Violence Against Women and Children

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is sad that despite all we have achieved in our country since democracy and all our efforts to create an age of hope, there are those that take dignity away from women and children through violence and abuse. From 25th November to 10th December we are running a campaign for 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children. This campaign is a call to all South Africans to build a country that truly cares for women and children by ending violence against them, and we as the government are saying this violence and criminal behaviour must stop!

We are working with communities, non-government organisations, and other structures in a united effort to eradicate this scourge of violence in our society. It is saddening when you read the papers and there are reports of young children being abused sometimes by the very people they trust; reports of wives being beaten or killed by their husbands; and of young women being raped.

So while we restore dignity to our people by planting trees and greening our areas we must work as a community to create a society that we can be proud of, a society that cares for women and children.

3. Arbor City Awards

Programme Director, the greening initiatives that we are recognising today complements my Department's vision for forestry, which states that "Forests are managed for people and we need to create an enabling environment for economic and social development through sustainable forestry, especially at the local level". Indeed, we are creating an enabling environment for social and economic development through this and other programmes.

The Arbor City Awards is a partnership programme between my Department and the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management aimed at encouraging municipalities to undertake greening initiatives within their areas. It was revitalized in 2002 with more emphasis on the previously disadvantaged areas such as townships and rural villages.

The aim of the programme is to recognize and provide incentives for towns and cities for their greening efforts with a special focus on previously disadvantaged areas. The programme is run as a competition and all municipalities are encouraged to participate.

The main objectives of the programme are:

- To encourage municipalities to undertake greening initiatives.
- Support them with the development and implementation of greening plans which include disadvantaged areas.
- Ensure that municipalities comply with relevant legislation regarding greening for example the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Act No 43 1983).
- Raise general awareness about the importance and value of greening in residential settlements.
- Provide incentives for Local Authorities that are trying their best to implement greening projects, especially in previously disadvantaged areas.
- Networking and sharing information.

Gauteng was the first Province to hold the awards in 2002 followed by the Eastern Cape; Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and next year it will be run in Mpumalanga. This competition has assisted my Department to understand the greening needs in the different Municipalities that enter, and provide support for the development and implement of their greening plans.

I look forward to the Municipalities in Mpumalanga becoming involved in next year's competition, and use the opportunity to improve the lives of their communities as Lephalale and the other five municipalities in Limpopo that entered this competition have done. Just by participating they are winners.

As in any competition there must be one overall winner. Lephalale won this year because of the many greening projects undertaken, which involve the villages and township in their Municipality. These are:

- 1) Planting of trees along a 14 kilometre stretch of road that connects the township and the town.
- 2) Developing parks in the township and cleaning greenbelts of unwanted invasive species that consume too much water and prevent the growth of indigenous species.
- 3) Eradicating unwanted trees within the township and residential areas and replacing them with indigenous and fruit trees, and
- 4) Using new innovations to eradicate the cactus species - *upunta*.

4. DWAF Greening Programmes

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Arbor City Awards is but one programme within my Department's greening strategy. The other initiatives we are involved in include a programme to support local municipalities develop and implement greening initiatives with communities. The strategy focuses on the development of greening plans within municipalities, partnerships with non-governmental organizations and the private sector. My Department also assists local government with including greening into their Integrated Development Plans.

Other Programmes supported by my Department include:

- Eduplant, a school greening programme.
- Trees for Homes, which focuses on greening programmes for low income housing development.
- Greening Fund aimed at funding greening projects.
- Arbor Week, which is held the first week of September every year to promote and popularise the planting of trees.
- Working for Water to remove alien invasive species; and
- A number of education and school programmes implemented with the Department of Education so that our children learn the importance of trees from a young age. We are also encouraging our youth to enter the field of forestry and take advantage of the many opportunities that exist in this exciting area.

5. Conclusion

To conclude Ladies and Gentlemen, I encourage and invite local government, provincial departments and other stakeholders to join my Department to ensure that greening takes place in the Province. I am pleased to hear that in this village some trees were planted in collaboration between my Department, the Municipality and the Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. This shows that all spheres of government can work together to ensure service delivery.

Programme Director, I would like to express my gratitude to our sponsors, especially TOTAL South Africa, for their continued support towards ensuring that Arbor City Awards continues - I thank them for the prize money, the certificate and the trophy for this programme. To the other sponsors – Malanseuns, thank you for the trees; and Professional Irrigation Agencies thank you for drywater packages. My Department appreciates your participation in this programme.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Lepelle Northern Water for their support of this event. To the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management, without your support and assistance during our planning phase, this programme would not be as successful. I would also like to congratulate the adjudication team that conducted the judging of the competition for their good work. I understand you had to travel many kilometres to ensure that you visit each of the participating Municipalities.

Finally thank you to the Community of Ga-Seleka and Lephalale. Let us green our environment for a greater and better future.

“Plant a tree – grow our future”.

I thank you.

I will now ask the sponsors, the President of the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management, the Premier of Limpopo and the MEC for Local Government and Housing to join me to present the Lephalale Municipality with their prizes and certificate.

I thank you.