

National Water Summit
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Gallagher Estate, Midrand
4 May 2006

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Speech by Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Ms B. Sonjica at the

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Programme Director
Deputy Minister of Department of Provincial and Local Government
Chairperson and Members of the Water Portfolio Committee
Ambassador Brylle of Denmark
Representative from the Embassy of Cuba, Mr. Ramos
Executive Mayors
Other Members of the Executive Council
Mayors and Councillors- Special Welcome to new Councillors
The Director General of Water Affairs and Forestry
Provincial and National Officials
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen.

A week ago we celebrated the Freedom Day, a day which carries huge significance for this country. On Monday, we celebrated Workers' Day and this day is also very significant in the history of our country. Whilst by nature these two days are about celebrating the contribution made by our people towards our freedom, it is also a sad reminder that our poor still remain entrapped in poverty and many are still without services.

In the Fourth World Water Forum held in Mexico in March of this year, our country was recognized for the strides it has made in making water a human right. We therefore cannot remain unconcerned about the masses of our people who live in dire conditions of poverty and are still without water and sanitation services.

Having this National event attended by all of you here is a dream comes true for me and my Department. Programme Director, allow me to share with you the vision that we should embrace to guide us as a country in general and the Department in particular. We have to cherish a vision of being a country that uses water and forestry productively and sustainably for social and economic activities, in a manner that promotes growth, development and prosperity of all our people to achieve social justice and equity.

Over the last year, we went around all the nine provinces where we held Provincial Summits. Naturally, the key objective of these summits was to deliberate on all water related issues. However, the most important objective from my side was to find ways of supporting all the provinces in meeting their Provincial Growth and Development objectives. This is our role as a leader, a supporter and a regulator of the sector which we take very seriously. Furthermore, in the context of the above legislative mandates, the meeting of the Millennium Development Goals is of key interest to my Department.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you who supported these summits. It is through your leadership and participation that I can confidently say all the Provincial Summits were very successful. Today I can safely say we have a very sound understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the water sector.

I am very excited to be part of this important National Summit which is aimed at attaining two important objectives: **improving delivery of water and sanitation, and seeking ways in which water can contribute to growth and development in our beloved country.**

My Department has been undergoing an interesting process of evolution and transformation in terms of its legislative mandate. We are all aware that the National Water Act of 1998 defines the role of the Department as that of a Supporter, Regulator, and a Leader. Until now, the understanding of the implications of this legislative mandate in the sector has been very limited. As we progress with the implementation of this Act through the National Water Resource Strategy, we begin to appreciate how profound and important our responsibility is as a custodian of this resource, water. This National Water Summit is therefore a useful platform where this understanding can be shared with all of you as key role players.

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Many of you may be aware of the National Water Resource Strategy (NWRS) which the Department developed at the end of 2004. In essence, this strategy is about putting our legislation and the principles of water resources management into action. It is also about looking after water and making sure that it is used in such a manner that our communities, society at large and our economy grow. What is even more exciting is that the NWRS is in fact embracing the fundamental principles of ASGI-SA. All the initiatives that my Department is embarking on are encompassed in the NWRS and I would like to encourage all of you to read this document which has been included in your summit package.

Our Government has set very ambitious targets for meeting the millennium Development Goals. We are saying that by 2008 all people should have received basic water and by 2010, all our communities should have received basic sanitation. The Mpumalanga Province has already made remarkable progress in the eradication of the bucket system, and this can only mean one thing, if we set our minds and effort to this challenge, it can be overcome. Our people have waited for more than ten years for water and sanitation services, and for those who are still without these services, freedom is but an elusion.

Members of the Water Sector, today I would like you to address yourself to these two fundamental questions: what contribution can each one of us make? what can we do differently to ensure that the above challenges are addressed?

Ladies and gentlemen, we have an obligation to respond to the call made by our President in his State of the Nation Address, where he identified ASGI-SA as one of the programmes that is key to achieving growth and development in our country. Water is not only life, water is key and fundamental to any kind of development. Water is therefore an important catalyst and component of ASGISA, no economic growth can be attained without it.

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In the Fourth World Water Forum, the role of Integrated Water Resource Planning (IWRP) came as key to the progression of developing countries. In essence, what this means to us as the water sector is that, other sectors are dependent on the success we make in availing this resource in order for them to meet their own targets. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a responsibility we need to take very seriously. It is therefore not a coincidence that the theme for this Summit is "Water for Economic Growth and Development". My Department is making it a priority to work closely with the offices of the Premiers in all the provinces in order to provide meaningful support to their Provincial Growth and Development Strategies.

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In the Fourth World Water Forum, a call was also made for local institutions responsible for water services delivery to have an understanding of water resource issues in order to appreciate the value chain of water delivery. This is a challenge that my Department is looking at as we will be rolling out the training programme for the new Councillors in June 2006.

Like all other Departments, our Department has a challenge of ensuring that we contribute to the growth and development that ASGI-SA seeks to achieve. I would like to take this opportunity to briefly share with you what these initiatives entail.

One of the programmes that my Department has earmarked for accelerated growth and development is the Water Allocation Reform which I launched in 2005. In our country, due to the historical imbalances and the legacy of apartheid, water investments and support were directed to the commercial farmers. There is a therefore a need for some reform in terms of allocation of water resources to address this problem and this is what this programme seeks to achieve. If the water reallocation process is well aligned with the Land Reform Programme, we should not only see poor farmers benefiting, but see these farmers graduating to commercial activities. I am sure that you will agree with me when I say, growth in this area is very critical as it will benefit the poorest of the poor who reside in the most rural parts of our country. The three main provinces that immediately come to my mind here are the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

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Let us be reminded that the objective of ASGISA is to reduce unemployment by 50% in the second decade of our democracy. In an effort to contribute to this objective, my Department has a new project that is focusing on "Job creation in Sanitation Delivery". This project is aimed at improved delivery in sanitation whilst also focusing on job creation.

At this point in time, we are also appealing for support in our new initiative, "Sanitation and Job Creation project."

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As some of you may be aware, my Department is embarking on big infrastructure development projects that will ensure that more water is available to meet both basic needs and economic growth, and that jobs are created in the process. The Olifants Dam is being constructed in the Limpopo area to cater for water needs of envisaged mining activities in that area. The whole project including other infrastructure will cost about R4, 8 billion. More work is being done to improve supply to Eskom and Sasol and the construction of the pipeline is worth R2,5 billion. In the Western Cape, The Berg Water Project is underway to deal with impending water shortages in the metropolis. This project of R2, billion is due for completion by end of 2007. I am hoping that these initiatives will address some of the concerns raised by the Limpopo Province and the agricultural Sector in the Western Cape.

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A fundamental principle in the NWRS is the involvement and participation of local people and institutions in the management of the water resource. It is in this context that my Department is involved in the institution reform process that seeks to ensure better management of water resources, equitable allocation, cost efficient and cost effective delivery of water services. These are the kinds of strategies and processes that will enhance the chances of involvement and empowerment of communities and ensure better efficiencies in the management of water resources. May I also say at this point, these are some of the initiatives that put our country in a positive spotlight at the recently held World Water Forum in Mexico.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, as I indicated some time ago, these summits are not mere talk shows. I would like to share with you critical common issues that came out of the Provincial summits, and more importantly, what progress has been made to address key issues that you identified.

It was to be expected that in all the provinces, the issue of capacity of the sector and specifically of Local Government to meet the challenges of service delivery came out as a priority. As a sector leader and supporter, my Department is extremely concerned about this issue. There are various initiatives that are being coordinated within the sector by the DBSA, the DPLG, DWAF, the Private Sector and the SAICE, etc, to tackle this challenge. A presentation focusing on this issue is on tomorrow's programme. In addition to initiatives by the above role-players, my Department is currently reviewing how it can better structure itself and reinforce its own capacity in order to provide more meaningful support to the sector, especially municipalities that are struggling.

As you would imagine, capacity constraints at Local Government level manifest themselves in various ways. The state of infrastructure throughout the country is one of the most common concerns that came out of all the summits. It is, according to Provincial reports, a glaring fact that most municipalities are not effectively operating and maintaining their infrastructure. An analysis of the underlying factors to this problem has been done by my Department and I would like to see a definite Programme of Action coming out of this Summit to address this urgent matter.

Poorly managed infrastructure has serious consequences, and one of them is reflected through drinking water quality problems. From the summits' report, it became clear that most municipalities require assistance in managing their drinking water quality. As some of you may be aware, South Africa is one of the countries in the world where you can drink water from a tap without any fear. I am appealing to all of you to work hard on ensuring that high standard is maintained.

From a regulatory perspective, our Department has a responsibility of ensuring that municipalities adhere to standards which we have set. We are currently working on a comprehensive Drinking Water Management programme that focuses on regulating the sector and also providing proactive support to municipalities. I would like to further state that, following maggots that were allegedly found in drinking water in certain parts of the country, my Department appointed a Task Team that investigated this matter. I am glad to announce that the results of this study confirm one fact; our water is safe to drink. We will continue to improve on our drinking water quality monitoring programmes. The Free State province with the support of CSIR has set a very high standard that other provinces need to catch up on. Given the importance of this aspect, I would like to appeal to all municipalities to take the management of drinking water quality very seriously.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, South Africa is a water scarce country, and we all have an obligation to use this resource with responsibility. One of the key findings that came from the summits' report, is the need for municipalities to adopt more progressive strategies of saving water through water conservation and water demand management strategies. This is also an area where I see the role of the NGO's and our youth working together with the sector in educating our people.

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As a regulator and sector leader, I am also deeply concerned about the pollution of our rivers by industries, and sadly enough, in some cases, by municipalities. I urge all municipalities to make sure that they pay attention to bulk infrastructure in terms of operation, maintenance and investment. My Department is working very hard on ensuring that there is enforcement and compliance, especially in the following areas:

- Drinking water Quality
- Pollution
- Illegal abstraction, storage and use of water. We are working with the Department of Environmental Affairs in this regard and there are very useful lessons we can learn from them.

My Department is also aware of the challenges around the implementation of Free Basic Water. This is an area we are looking at with the objective of providing more support to municipalities who are charged with this responsibility.

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I was pleasantly surprised to learn about follow up actions taken by most provinces after the summits. Most provinces successfully developed Provincial Water Sector Plans which actually put into effect recommendations that came from the Provincial Summits. Furthermore, Gauteng and Free State provinces held their own regional summits that were focusing on more region specific issues. This can only be an illustration of your commitment, and this I fully appreciate!!

Let me say all this good work is only the beginning. All of us in this hall should not rest until the last person is served with water and sanitation services!!

I would therefore like this summit to attain three important objectives:

- Collectively Identify challenges that should be regarded as National Water Priorities and develop programmes around them.
- Development of a programme of action that will ensure that provinces develop Provincial Water Sector Plans which in turn will be aligned to Provincial Growth and Development Strategy. It is therefore expected that the Provincial Water Sector plans will also be aligned to the Municipal Integrated Development Plans. It is important that all the plans mentioned, reflect the principles of the National Water Resource Strategy.
- Strengthen collaboration and a culture of working together in the sector within the framework and spirit of the Intergovernmental Relations Framework (IGRF).
- To have a focused sector strategy that will ensure that we meet our targets

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I am encouraged by the fact that there is a strong sense and culture of collaboration in the water sector and I feel privileged by this support. This spirit has been well illustrated by how all of you present here have prioritized attendance to this summit. The challenges mentioned above are therefore not insurmountable. I am consequently looking forward to a fruitful and successful summit that should contribute towards the improvement of the lives of all our people.

I thank you.