

Première of the documentary film “Running Dry”
Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
CSIR Convention Centre, Pretoria
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Dr Sibisi, President and CEO of CSIR
Jane Seymour
Jim Thebaut
Sir Paul Lever
Distinguished guests
Programme Director

It is indeed an honour for me to address you at the première screening of the documentary “Running Dry”.

Southern Africa is a water stressed region. The link between social and economic progress and the supply of safe drinking water is clear; and our ability to manage our water resources in support of the much needed social and economic development required by our region will determine whether we succeed in bringing prosperity and creating a better life for our people.

The converse is equally clear, with lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation pushing people further into poverty and denying them a basic human right. How do young children develop properly when they are not given clean drinking water and run the risk of diseases and illness? How do women and children who live in squatter camps or shanty towns safely go to the bathroom at night when their toilet is several hundred metres away, and they run the risk of assault?

These are obvious questions but the challenge in dealing with these issues is enormous, and it is imperative that we raise awareness on what can only be seen as a ‘humanitarian water crisis’ for developing countries. This documentary “Running Dry” aims to create awareness on the extent of the problem and the very real challenges faced by impoverished communities in the developing world. It further helps us to understand the severity of the crisis and presents a spectrum of solutions available to solve it.

One of the biggest challenges facing governments, particularly in water stressed regions is how to respond to these needs so that enough water can be made available from limited resources to meet the growing requirements, and then to ensure that adequate infrastructure for water supply and sanitation services is provided to all citizens from these resources.

For South Africa this response started with our constitution, which guarantees the right to water for all and is supported by international agreements, such as the millennium development goals. From this starting point of recognising provision of water services as a basic human right we as the relevant government department are able to put in place the policies, legislation, and institutional mechanisms so that these critical services are delivered to our people. We are supported by our President who has given us targets of achieving universal access to water by 2008 and sanitation by 2010, as well as the Minister of Finance who has allocated resources towards achieving these targets, as well as towards creating the bulk infrastructure for building new dams and pipelines which are required to meet the increasing demand for water.

This year I was able to attend the Stockholm International Water Week, and one of the issues being discussed was the concern that we will start running out of water in 20 years due to increasing demand and change in weather patterns, as some have predicted. The message coming through was that if we better manage our water resources we can avoid such a crisis. It is of course necessary for us to respond to climate change issues and we look forward to positive actions from the current discussions that are taking place in Kenya on the new commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

South Africa has developed a National Water Resource Strategy (2004), which paints a clear picture of water scarcity in South Africa, with many of our river catchment areas and regions already in a situation of stress, with water requirements greater than local water resources can provide. There are however some undeveloped water resources that can still be utilized in future. Our water resources will therefore have to be very well managed and allocated in order to make ends meet in the future.

Our National Water Resource Strategy sets out a number of management approaches, which include:
1. Water efficiency: If water is not in plentiful supply it is all the more important that it be used sparingly and efficiently. In recent years my Department has placed particular emphasis on the elimination of water wastage and the increase of water-use efficiency by all user sectors. An article in the Sunday Times 5th November reports on the problem facing Joburg Water where it is believed that up to a third of the city’s

water supply is being lost through leakages and water theft. This council is not alone and it is critical that we deal with such issues urgently.

2. Water for people and development vs water for the environment: We need to achieve a fair and sustainable balance between reserving water for the conservation of aquatic ecosystems on the one hand, and on the other having enough water to meet needs of people and the need for water to support economic development. Water for nature and the environment is very important, but so is the right of previously disadvantaged people to expect a better standard of living in future.

3. Water Sources: We must make optimal use of the limited surface and groundwater resources that are at our disposal. It is envisaged that the development and exploitation of groundwater resources will be productively managed in future to make a significant contribution to improving the water balance in many regions all over the country. We also need to start looking at new technologies that can lower the costs and improve the quality of providing water from the sea and in treatment of wastewater. The desalination of sea water represents a virtually unlimited water resource, and with rapid advances in desalination technology, as well as the depletion of conventional land-based resources, it is an option that we need to explore further, especially for coastal cities.

4. Dams: The further development of surface water resources through the building of more storage dams is necessary. The intermittent nature of river flows in the country requires the provision of storage to make water available at an acceptable level. More inter-basin or inter-regional transfer schemes will also have to be provided to get water from places where viable dams can still be built to where the water is required, mostly the growing metropolitan centres.

5. Information: We must ensure that we meet the ongoing need for good quality water-related information. This includes the long-term monitoring and assessment of water resources and water requirements to make certain that the right water resource development and management decisions can be made when they are needed.

Programme director, ladies and gentlemen, in implementing our water policy one of the priorities for my department has been to ensure that there is deepening of democracy in the allocation of water; and for local stakeholders to have a say about matters that impact upon their lives is an important aspect of a democratic society. To this end we have started establishing local institutions known as Catchment Management Agencies which aim to foster more localised water resource management through participative structures and processes.

We all know that water is crucial for economic development and hence Municipalities and Provincial Government need to be aware of the availability of water within their respective areas in order to factor that in their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and provincial growth and development strategies. It is, therefore, imperative for Provincial and Local Government to play a direct role in the Catchment Management Agencies that are being established.

Another important programme that my department is implementing is Water Allocation Reform or WAR; this programme deals with water use for equity and economic development purposes, is very dependent on a co-ordinated approach to ensure that water of good quality and quantity is always available for our citizens for these purposes. Apart from dealing with equity in water use among the big water users, WAR also focuses on helping smaller users and poor people use water productively to give them the opportunity to be able to participate in the economy as well. It specifically deals with water use that goes beyond domestic water provision. The WAR programme is currently gaining momentum in its roll-out across the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I mentioned already South Africa has prioritised delivery of sanitation services, and through "*Operation Gijima*" we are accelerating provision of sanitation to rural areas. The programme is designed to create jobs in the process of eradicating the bucket latrine system. In addition we are working with our colleagues in the Department of Education to eliminate the backlog of sanitation in schools, which has been reduced from 4 300 in September 2004 to 2 118 by March this year.

We are also working very hard to ensure the delivery of water to our communities, with 15 million more people now have access to water since 1994, with approximately 1 million more people gaining access per annum - an amount that will be increased as we move towards achieving our target of universal access by 2010.

In addition, it is important to note that approximately 19,2 million of our 22,4 million poor people are currently receiving a basic allocation of 6 kilo litres per month of their water free of charge. While specific challenges

have been raised around the quantity of free basic water that is being allocated to people, this policy is making a significant difference to the lives of the poor.

Drinking water quality is critical to the well-being of all South Africans and is therefore an important area of focus for my Department. While South Africa is maintaining a very high standard of water quality provided to people living in the metropolitan and greater urban areas, it is important that we are open about the challenges that exist in this area so that we are able to effectively address them. To this end my Department partnered with the Free State Provincial Government and Local Authorities to pilot an electronic system to monitor the quality of water; and the success of this joint effort has resulted in more than 95% of the authorities in the Free State collecting the data and complying with quality requirements. With the assistance of the CSIR, this system is now being rolled out to the rest of the country so that in a short period all Water Services Authorities will have an electronic Drinking Water Quality Management System.

To conclude, while much progress is being made in addressing the challenges facing the water sector, there is a pressing need to increase awareness of these and future challenges, specifically in support of public policy and effective implementation of such policies.

We believe that the widespread screening of the Running Dry documentary will support this cause and are grateful to the producer, sponsors and guests for promoting this very important event.

I thank you.