

South African Youth Water Prize Award Ceremony
Speech by Mrs L Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Mehlokazulu Secondary School, Imbali Township, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal
18 August 2006

Programme Director
Honourable Mayor
Honourable MECs
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature
Councillors
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Sanibonani, Molweni, Good Morning:

It is my honour and privilege to share this important occasion with you in this beautiful province of ours. Today is yet another inspiring occasion that gives one comfort and hope that, through our efforts, our youth – and our country – have a very bright future! We are here to congratulate the national winners and the finalists of the South African Youth Water Prize project. As I am relatively new in this portfolio, I am indeed honoured to witness the good initiatives and creativity of our future leaders. It is very encouraging to see that our youth take advantage of the many opportunities that Government has created for them. It is through initiatives of such brilliant and hard-working learners that the aspirations of our people will be realised. These youth have one or two things they can teach us about water resource management and sanitation, and this is an opportunity I would never want to miss!

As we know, the achievements of these youth are coincidentally being celebrated during Women's Month. I must therefore start by congratulating the mothers who nurtured and guided these children to where they are. Throughout this month, we continue to celebrate the important role that women of this country have played in our emancipation. As South African women, we cannot afford to fail the efforts of those brave women who fought for our democracy and we must continue our efforts to create a caring nation, and a better life for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the as Department of Water Affairs and Forestry we are committed to the democratisation of the management of water resources to that we achieve universal access to water and sanitation service. The participation of our communities and our children as stakeholders is crucial to us achieving this goal. My Department is also responsible for ensuring that the water resources of our country are sustained for future generations. Unfortunately, as South Africans, we do not yet fully appreciate what an important resource water is. Most South Africans are not aware that our country is a water-scarce country – in fact, one of the 30 most arid countries in the world. The sustainability of this resource will be achieved only if the citizens are educated about water resource management, sanitation, health and hygiene. It is in this context that my Department is passionately driving education and awareness programmes such as the 2020 Vision for Water and Sanitation Education Programme.

The 2020 Vision for Water and Sanitation Education Programme seeks to educate society through children and, at the same time, encouraging innovation amongst the youth. Through this Programme, communities and learners will be empowered with knowledge that will enable them to participate actively in the management of water resources and sanitation. From this education, our communities will be able to use water efficiently and effectively; to minimise pollution; and to practise good hygiene.

The South African Youth Water Prize is one of the projects of the 2020 Vision Programme.

The South African Youth Water Prize works in collaboration with the Stockholm Water Foundation in Sweden, which is aimed at encouraging learners to participate actively in water issues. This programme further enhances the interest of learners in science and technology as

well as mathematics. The high school learners identify water and sanitation-related problems; conduct research; and recommend innovative solutions to identified problems. The learners are mobilised for participation through media and the distribution of brochures to schools. Provincial competitions are followed by a National competition. Every year, during the World Water Week, the national winners of the South African Youth Water Prize represent South Africa in the International Junior Water Prize Competition in Stockholm, Sweden. Learners from approximately 35 countries participate in this Competition. The learners who win today will be the youth ambassadors of South Africa.

As a minister, a woman and a parent, I am very happy to see that the young people of this country are contributing to our future through their own initiatives and achievements. To witness these young learners standing toe-to-toe and shoulder-to-shoulder with other great nations of the world, and representing their country at the international competition in Stockholm, is an achievement in itself. An important part of our struggle for freedom in South Africa was to create the environment for our youth to thrive.

I am very happy about the achievement of our learners so far. South Africa has scooped the international prize in Sweden, on two occasions already, 2003 and 2005! This is a further testimony to the fact that our country is determined to take its rightful place in the global arena!

My Department has committed itself to supporting learners that wish to pursue careers in water, sanitation and forestry; and will be awarding bursaries to learners that qualify.

I believe that all education and awareness programmes that target schools will be effective only if they are implemented in collaboration with the Department of Education both at National and Provincial level. It is in our interest therefore, that we strengthen our collaboration with these departments' of education, and that educators are provided with resource materials that will create an environment that would enable them to teach learners about water and sanitation through the school curriculum.

My Department has already developed curriculum-aligned educational resource materials, as tools, for learners from Grade R to Grade 9. The materials have been developed in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Department of Health and also sector partners. It is very encouraging that our children will from an early age learn about water and sanitation. I hope that in turn, young people will transfer this knowledge and skills to parents as well as their communities.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry youth programme is contributing to addressing the challenges that our country is facing with regard to scarce skills in the science and technical fields; skills which are required if we as a country are going to achieve faster economic growth in line with the Accelerated and Shared Growth Strategy – South Africa (ASGISA). Given that those who have these skills are aging and many will soon be retiring, we need more of our children, especially girls, to study science and mathematics. The reality is that our learners are still reluctant to take up mathematics and science subjects despite the enormous employment opportunities that exist for people with skills in these areas. However, as a Department, we are taking the responsibility of encouraging them to take up these subjects and we are providing them with resources such as laboratories and computers.

I am very pleased and encouraged to hear that the Departments of Education, Health, Arts and Culture, Environmental Affairs, Science and Technology as well as water utilities, NGOs and the private sector are collaborating with this youth development programme.

I would like to congratulate the MEC for Education in KwaZulu-Natal (who could not make it for this event) and KwaZulu-Natal educators for doing an excellent job in promoting science and technology. This success is evident as ten schools from KwaZulu-Natal scooped the national prizes of the *Baswa Le Meetse* Awards between 2003 and 2006 (another programme of DWAF to

encourage learners to enter the science and technology fields). These schools won media classrooms and water play-pumps.

I propose that we strengthen the partnership between the two Departments by formalising our co-operation through signing a collaboration agreement, and look forward to visiting KwaZulu Natal in the near future to sign such an agreement.

Programme Director, allow me to congratulate the national winners of the South African Youth Water Prize 2006 – Nompilo Mahlobo, Thobile and Thokozani Mbanjwa – the young ambassadors of our country, who will carry our national flag in Stockholm, Sweden, tomorrow. On behalf of our Government, we send you off to Stockholm with love, pride and best wishes. We hope that you will bring the Stockholm Junior Water Prize back home. I will also be in Stockholm to support you.

I also want to congratulate the finalists from eight provinces. I am told that they are also eligible for prizes such as computers, bursaries and cash awards. I would like to say to them – it is not about winning, it is about participation, gaining experience, improving living conditions of your communities and taking on new challenges.

As we celebrate our achievements, I would like to appeal to all the young people here, to take charge of their lives and future. HIV and Aids are an enemy we need to fight with all our strength. As young brilliant people with a bright future, let us not fall prey to this terrible disease. The key to success in this regard is the A-B-C principle: Abstain, Be faithful and Condomise!

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the adjudicating team for their sterling work. We appreciate your dedication and commitment to youth development. And to the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the Water Research Commission, Umgeni Water, and Mhlathuze Water for sponsoring this project. Isandla sihlamba esinye. Yenzani njalo ukuxhasa amalinge esizwe sethu.

Lastly, this programme is driven with a lot of passion by officials from my Department and the Department of Education. No wonder it is a tremendous international success! I must congratulate them for their hard work.

***“Youth are our future; educate the child to educate the nation”
Water is life, Water is our future.***

Ngiyabonga

(Note: the speech was delivered in isiZulu)