

**National Women's Day Celebration**  
**Speech by Mrs L Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Kromhoek, Limpopo**  
**10 August 2006**

**“AGE OF HOPE: THROUGH STRUGGLE TO FREEDOM“**

Programme Director  
MECs  
Councillor Refilwe Kubyana, Mayor of Blouberg Municipality  
Members of Parliament  
Members of Provincial Legislature  
Councillors  
Director General: Water Affairs and Forestry  
Honourable guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

### **1. Introduction**

I am delighted and honoured to be in this Province, to commemorate with the women of Limpopo a very important event in our history.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic women's march to the Union Buildings in defiance of the unjust apartheid laws and also marks the 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Freedom Charter. Earlier this year, during the State of the Nation Address, President Mbeki said "Clearly the masses of our people are convinced that our country has entered the Age of Hope. They believe that the country they love, their only homeland, will not disappoint their expectation of an accelerated advance towards the day when they will be liberated from the suffocating tentacles of the legacy of colonialisation and apartheid".

I think it is always necessary to remind our young generation and recount the events of 9 August 1956, when twenty thousand women gathered on the steps of the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest to Mr JG Strijdom, the then Prime Minister, against the impending pass laws that would severely restrict their freedom of movement.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it was on that day that our grandmothers and our mothers (great people and leaders such as, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Dora Tamana) cried out: "Strijdom, *Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo. Uzakufa!*" – "you strike a woman, you strike a rock. You will be crushed". These twenty thousand women, reacting to the extension of pass laws to African women, presented a petition demanding an end to the pass laws.

The 1955 Congress of the People (the year before that historic march) proclaimed, through the Freedom Charter, that all would be equal before the law; that in South Africa there would be no regard to sex, colour or creed in determining our place in society.

The battle cry, "All shall be equal" became the premise on which our struggle for democracy was based, and it has also had great significance and meaning to the struggle for women's emancipation. For decades, ordinary South African women from all walks of life – some whose names the struggle has engraved in granite – stood side by side with men folk to advance the cause of women.

### **2. Women in the Democratic South Africa**

Programme director, at the dawn of our democracy, recognition was indeed given to women. At the opening of the first democratically elected Parliament, the then President, Mr Nelson Mandela, set the agenda for addressing the rights of women in a post-apartheid South Africa. He said:

"Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us must take this on board that the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme will not have been realised unless we see, in practical and visible

terms, that the conditions of women in our country has been changed for the better and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life as equals with any other member of society.”

It was through the impact of events such as the 1956 march; through visionary leadership; and through the hard work of women, that today:

- We have a Constitution and Bill of Rights that purposefully protect the rights of women and all vulnerable groups in society.
- We have a legislative framework that aims to facilitate easy access to all social services by women.
- We are proud signatories to international agreements that support women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- We have many pieces of legislation that promote gender equality and empowerment of women, such as the Child Care Act, the Social Assistance Bill, and the Domestic Violence and Maintenance Act.
- We also have numerous programmes and projects that government has developed to focus specifically on women.

Our government has been exemplary in advocating equitable representation of women in decision-making positions. This has resulted in a significant increase in female representation in all three spheres of government.

In the world’s register of women in National Parliaments, we are number 12; and in Africa we stand second after Rwanda, which has the highest percentage in the world, with 49% women representation in its Parliament. As South Africa, at the last national election, we said we wanted a minimum of 30% of parliamentary seats for women, and are moving to a situation where 50% of leadership positions are given to women. Already, as Ministers and Deputy Ministers, we are over 40% women, and in December 2005 Cabinet passed a resolution that women’s representation should be 50% of senior managers in the public service and 2% for disabled persons.

We know, however, that there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done in order for women to be truly equal. There is still discrimination by some who consider women inferior, and it is therefore necessary that we as women – no matter our position in society, do not rest until we are equal in politics, in government, in our jobs, in our economy, and, very importantly, in our homes. We, as women, must be at the forefront of making things happen for ourselves.

The power of the collective is much stronger than one individual acting alone. And over the past few years a number of organisations, societies, and other structures have been set up by women to create economic opportunities, provide assistance, and give each other support. Earlier this week a new structure, the Progressive Women’s Movement of South Africa, was launched in Bloemfontein as an organisation to support the advancement of women in our country.

### **3. Women and Water**

Programme director, ladies and gentlemen, we know that the task of ensuring water is available in the household is that of a woman. In the pre-1994 era, access to water was not regarded as a fundamental right, and water policies were mainly geared to meet the needs of the white minority. Over a decade ago, the ANC-led Government estimated that there were approximately 15,8 million people who did not have access to safe drinking-water and 21 million people without adequate sanitation services.

These people, mainly in the rural areas were forced to fetch water from springs and rivers. The women and girl children in these areas were condemned to spend several hours a day walking to collect water, and sadly also shared these streams with animals; and is unfortunately still a reality in

some parts of our country, including this Province. This lack of access to both water and sanitation has made it difficult for our people to escape poverty.

South Africa's water services policy has over the past twelve years focused on ensuring access by the poor to adequate basic water supply and sanitation services. By providing these services, we have helped to reduce the inequalities in our country and contributed to giving people back their dignity.

Since 1994, access to basic water supply and sanitation in South Africa has improved dramatically and more than 12 million people have been supplied with clean water. The water supply backlog was at 41% in 1994, and by 2005, the backlog stood at 17%. The sanitation backlog, at 52% in 1994, has been reduced by 40% and now stands at 31%. The government has set targets that should see the eradication of the water supply backlog by 2009, and the eradication of the general sanitation backlog by 2011.

#### **4. DWAF work in Limpopo**

I feel very honoured today to celebrate with all of you the successes we achieved jointly by our Department and communities from this province. Since August 2005, the Department has been encouraging communities to participate in programmes that will ensure empowerment of rural women through service delivery. Our Regional office has been instrumental in supporting these community projects and today, we are here to celebrate the fruits of these initiatives.

Please allow me to highlight some of these projects:

##### **4.1 Thate Vondo**

I am particularly encouraged by the Thate Vondo bee-keeping project, located in Thate, in Venda at Makhado District, which is managed by seven women. The honey produced is being given to the Bee Foundation as part of the partnership agreement, and they earn profit out of that. Through the bee harvesting that takes place twice a year, these women are able to put food on the table for their families.

As government, we need to look at means of making initiatives of this nature sustainable, and I would like to call upon any government department to support these women. These ladies have indicated that they require an extra 20 boxes for harvesting. The Department is currently engaged in addressing some of these issues through our Forestry unit. My Department is also erecting a fence and an office to create a conducive working environment for this project.

May the people responsible for this project stand up and receive our recognition.

##### **4.2 Bulamahlo**

Bulamahlo is a Forestry nursery run by two unemployed women. The project is well-organised and has running water.

Women responsible for this project will from now onwards determine a market-related price for themselves when selling these trees, my own Department will also buy trees from these ladies during Arbour Week. It is my wish to see this project grow and, on behalf of these women, I would again like to appeal for any form of assistance to the project.

Could the two ladies please stand up so that we can see them?

##### **4.3 Kromhoek Household Sanitation, Water Supply:**

The Kromhoek Household Sanitation and Water Supply project covers 12 villages in Blouberg. More than 210 sanitation facilities have been completed and around 300 facilities are still outstanding. The project is run by seven members – four women, and three men as the Project Steering Committee members. It is my understanding that households still use old toilets, and the new toilets built under this project are not being utilised. In certain instances, we are told that these toilets are reserved for visitors while households use old structures that do not comply to health standards. Old structures

that do not conform to the health and hygiene standards are a health hazard to women and children. Whilst the provision of infrastructure is important, practising health and hygiene is critically important. My Department will therefore have to ensure that health and hygiene awareness is an integral part of this project.

Could the people responsible for this project please stand up and receive our recognition.

#### **4.4 Refilwe Brick Manufacturing:**

The programmes that we have been running in this area to provide sanitation have created opportunities for a business in this community to supply us with bricks. The Refilwe Brick Manufacturing project is a typical example of the principle of job creation through service delivery. The project was born from the Kromhoek sanitation project and its main purpose is to service the sanitation project with bricks for the construction of toilets. The project is sustainable and bricks are also being manufactured for sale to the general public.

#### **4.5 Project Challenges**

Programme director, in all of these projects we have identified challenges such as training on business management, marketing, bookkeeping, and management of finances, as well as the need for office space and access to finance. These challenges are similar to those experienced by any business enterprise and it will be necessary for SMME support organisations to visit these projects and provide them with training and support.

I am aware of problems that can come about because of fighting amongst the members of the project. It is important that we as women do not allow these conflicts to harm the project or business, and that we work as a collective so that we can all benefit.

#### **5. Other Projects**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would also like to mention the Waterberg Sanitation Project at Mokopane, under the Waterberg district, which covers quite a number of villages. The Department is currently looking at ways to deal with problems experienced by women in this project and I make a commitment that solutions to these problems will be sought.

Our Working for Water Project continues to make a direct contribution to poverty alleviation in this Province. These projects are located in Tzaneen and Nylstroom and the contractors for both areas are women. The majority of employees are also women. I would like to encourage the people involved in all these development initiatives to continue with their good work.

It is my Department's priority to find ways in which water and forestry resources can contribute to growth and development, especially in rural areas where poverty levels are high. A big infrastructure development programme that will entail construction of a dam is underway in the Olifants River, and I appeal to the women in this province to seize opportunities that come from such developments. Also, our Water Allocation Reform programme which seeks to address equity in allocation of water resources is a good example. I would like to see more women getting new water allocations so that we can see more emerging female farmers.

In the area of forestry, through the National Forest Act, the links between community, conservation and commercial forestry are recognised and embraced, so there are opportunities for our people to access our national forests. We will ensure that our forests are utilised by communities, in conjunction with the State, for their economic advancement. The Steering Committee to drive a process of developing a Forestry Charter is finalising its work, and I call upon women to engage in this process. This initiative will contribute immensely in ensuring women participation in the mainstream of our economy, in a sector that has predominantly been male-dominated.

Before concluding, I must mention the dangers of HIV and AIDS. Women are extremely vulnerable to contracting this disease. You must become more aware of HIV and AIDS and empower yourselves with information; you must be empowered to discuss this issue with your partner and if necessary take

precautions; and if you have contracted HIV, you must take the medication and look after your body so that you do not contract opportunistic diseases.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, we as your elected representatives, need to remain vigilant in ensuring that the environment for women in business and in government is favourable, and that any policies of government are gender-sensitive and empowering to women.

The Department has recognised the importance of women empowerment, and we recently appointed a Gender-Focal person, Ms Ntsiki Magazi, to ensure that DWAF is better able to support women both within the Department and in the work that we do. Importantly, we need to create awareness amongst all staff in DWAF about the need to support women in the communities where we work, and to ensure that women within the Department are given opportunities to be promoted.

Ladies and gentlemen, access to clean water and to sanitation services is a priority for our government as it means improved quality of life, wellness, health and dignity. I have been informed that there are no proper sanitation services at the school that we visited earlier. I am committing resources from my Department's budget to ensure that toilets are installed and upgraded at that school as soon as possible.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you and my staff for having organised an event for the Department to honour Women's Day and to observe the Women's Month of August.

Phambili ngo mama ba seLimpopo phambili!!

***Wathinta Abafazi! Withinta imbokodo!***

I thank you.

End.