

**Launch of Arbor Week 2006**  
**Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Johannesburg Zoo, Johannesburg**  
**1 September 2006**

Programme director  
CEO of JHB ZOO  
CEO of Total  
Learners  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is wonderful to be here today at the Johannesburg Zoo to officially launch the start of Arbor Week, an annual event where we celebrate the importance of trees. I would like to congratulate the Zoo for all of their work and our main sponsor for today, TOTAL.

Trees are an integral part of the history of humankind as it the word arbor is derived from *Latin*.

The idea for Arbor Day originally came from Nebraska. A visit to Nebraska today wouldn't disclose that the state was once a treeless plain. Yet it was the lack of trees there that led to the founding of Arbor Day in the 1800s.

J. Sterling Morton advocated planting of trees, shrubs and flowers and on January 4, 1872, Morton first proposed a tree-planting holiday to be called "Arbor Day". The date was set for April 10, 1872. Prizes were offered to countries and individuals for planting properly the largest number of trees on that day. It was estimated that more than one million trees were planted in Nebraska on the first Arbor Day.

Arbor Day has now spread beyond the United States and is observed in many countries of the world.

Historically, South Africa has not had a culture of tree planting and it was not until the 1970's that a real need to promote tree planting was recognized. The concept of a National Arbor Day ensued from 1973 Green Heritage Campaign. The government approved in 1982 the establishment of National Arbor Day and it has been in place countrywide since 1983. In 1996, the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, emphasising its importance in South Africa extended Arbor Day from one day to one week. The campaign has evolved into a major event that receives major publicity and public participation throughout South Africa.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has initiated National Arbor Week to celebrate South Africa's trees and to raise awareness of their importance. Through Arbor Week we hope to:

- Promote a better knowledge of trees, particularly indigenous trees
- Highlight the important role that forestry plays in our economy, especially in the rural areas
- Raise awareness of the dangers of veld and forest fires
- Highlight the vital role of trees in our lives by organizing a variety of greening events
- Encourage everyone to participate in tree planting and greening activities

The Department has identified a tree of the year. Up to 2001 only one tree was selected. From 2002 two trees were identified as tree of the year, with one tree being a tree that is rare and another one that is common in South Africa. Trees has already been identified and published for up to 2015.

Trees of the year for 2006 are:

*Raphia australis* (Common Name: Kosi palm, Umvuma); rare species  
*Burchellia bubaline* (Common Name: Wild pomegranate, isiGolwane, umFincane) common species

The Department also provides annually a pamphlet on these trees indicating their distribution, general information and its uses.

Ever since 1996 Arbor Week was celebrated with messages attached to it. These were environmental as well as nation building messages. Some of the key themes for the previous years were the following:

- Greening: Where communities and schools were encouraged to participate in tree planting and greening programmes for beautification and improvement of their immediate environment.
- Commercial value of trees: Where the benefit that are derived from making products out of trees such as paper, planks and medicines were highlighted. It also emphasized the employment and business opportunities provided by trees and Forests.
- Veld and Forest Fires: Here the focus was on the prevention and combating of uncontrolled wild fires and encourages the formation of Fire Protection Associations.
- Remembrance tree planting: Where communities and individuals were encouraged to plant trees in memory of their loved ones and individuals who contributed to community development and nation building

Arbor Week has been used in promotion and launching of major greening initiatives such as new recreational parks and tree planting in low cost housing. Commercial and community based nurseries benefited through the supply of trees for greening and other tree planting events associated with arbor week. These have helped in the stimulation of local economic development.

In terms of the National Forests Act of 1998 certain tree species (types of trees) can be identified and declared as protected. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry followed an objective, scientific and participative process to arrive at the new list of protected tree species, enacted in 2004. The poster depicting these trees plus a guide to identify them will be launched during this year's Arbor Week.

The Department also supports other activities as part of its awareness programme that is evolved from Arbor Week and is celebrated during the month of September. One of these activities is the EduPlant programme, which is the national schools' Permaculture programme. EduPlant has impacted on schools, national government and the community of South Africa in a positive way and contributes to sustainable development, poverty alleviation, skills and capacity building and much more. EduPlant focuses on Permaculture, a system of farming and gardening that combines plants, animals, buildings, water, the local people and the landscape in a way that produces more energy than it uses, recycles all nutrients and waste, and imitates nature as much as possible. The programme is a partnership between the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Food and Trees for Africa and other role players.

Another of these activities of the Department is the Arbor City Award. The Arbor City Award is a greening competition that was introduced by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in conjunction with the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management during 2002. Its main purpose is to recognise and provide incentives to towns and cities for their greening efforts with specific focus on the previously disadvantaged townships and village areas. This competition has been run per province since its inception; the Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal provinces have already conducted this competition. This year it is being conducted in Limpopo.

For future engagement in Arbor Week the department is preparing a booklet on Trees and Forests Booklet for Schools. The booklet will cover the following aspects:

- The importance of trees
- Types of trees and species
- Botanical classification of trees
- Protected trees and types of forests

Another activity of the department is Champion trees. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) initiated the Champion Tree project to identify and protect individual trees or groups of trees of national conservation importance. This is the first project of its kind in Africa.

To date the Sofia Oaks was declared a champion tree and further 27 are currently being evaluated. The champion trees will be made public during next year's arbor week celebration when these trees will be honoured for their significant contribution they have made to society.

Forestry today is about the relationship between people and the resources provided by the forests. As in other countries, people living in and around forests collect a wide range of items growing in the forests to sustain and supplement their livelihoods. Forest resources provide three types of benefit, namely: (i) the supply of basic needs, (ii) saving of cash resources, and (iii) a buffer or safety-net during times of misfortune.

Today we are recognising learners from the different schools who – with the support of their educators – have made a difference in their school environment. Last year, during Arbor Week, the Johannesburg Zoo and TOTAL handed out trees to schools for them to plant. The Zoo gave some training in partnership with my Department and Food and Trees for Africa; and when TOTAL and the Zoo visited these schools, they found that the schools have improved their environment through greening and by starting food gardens. Today we will be recognising their efforts.

Learners will also have the opportunity after this morning's session to be taught more about trees and plants such as how to plant trees and herbs, the importance and uses of the plants and herbs; and the difference between indigenous and exotic trees; as well as learning more about careers in forestry.

I would like to congratulate all the schools, organisers and sponsors for their wonderful work. This project really confirms that by empowering our youth the theme for this year's Arbor Week of 'planting a tree, growing our future' has real meaning.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their contribution to making today's programme a success. I hope that when we return to our homes and schools we take with us more knowledge about trees as well as the importance of trees to our environment and society, so that we can make an impact on our communities.

I thank you.