

**Arbor Week 2006 Eastern Cape**  
**Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Qunu Village, Eastern Cape**  
**5 September 2006**

Premier  
Mayors and Councillors  
Distinguished Guests  
Programme Director  
Ladies and Gentlemen

### **1. Introduction**

I am honoured to be here today at the home village of Nelson Mandela to celebrate National Arbor Week 2006. There is much that we can learn from Madiba, and one of his most important messages to us has been to support the youth and invest in the next generation. As our theme for this year's Arbor Week is "Plant a Tree – Grow our Future" we thought it fitting that we hold this event here in Qunu.

In adopting this theme we are recognising that forests and trees are a very important part of the lives of people in rural areas, and that as the government we need to do more to create jobs and help to uplift our people through trees and forests.

President Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address last year said to us that during our Second Decade of Liberation we must eradicate poverty and underdevelopment. And our Arbor Week theme for this year highlights the value of trees in ensuring sustainable economic development and economic growth; and how trees and forests contribute towards creating a better life for all. Trees support people living in and around forests because people can collect a wide range of items growing in the forests such as wood, medicines, and food. There are also industries that use trees for paper, construction, and furniture; as well as having a number of other business opportunities related to forestry, such as tourism, sales of wood, charcoal production, beekeeping, sawmills, and more.

Expanding our forests creates employment and business opportunities, and contributes actively towards the governments programme to achieve faster economic growth and job creation – the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa, ASGI-SA. Trees and forests however take many years to grow so an investment today will yield rewards for our children - like we nurture our children, so we need to nurture our trees and forests to protect them, particularly against damage from fires.

### **2. History of Arbor Week**

Programme Director, I am sure there are many people in the audience today who are being exposed to National Arbor Week for the first time. I would like to use this opportunity to give a short history of Arbor Week and why we celebrate this event in South Africa.

Arbor Day was started in America by Mr J Sterling Morton in 1872. For many years he had been planting trees, shrubs and flowers in Nebraska, the State in which he was living because it was a treeless plain; and he proposed to his government to start a national day to plant trees. Success was achieved on the first Arbor Day on April 10, 1872 where more than one million trees were planted in Nebraska. If you visit Nebraska today you would not be able to see that it was once treeless.

Arbor Day has now spread beyond the United States and is observed in many countries of the world. In South Africa National Arbor Day was established in 1983 and in 1996 the new

government recognised the importance of trees extended Arbor Day to Arbor Week. During Arbor Week we celebrate South Africa's trees and raise awareness of their importance by:

- Promoting better knowledge of trees, particularly indigenous trees
- Highlighting the important role that forestry plays in our economy, especially in the rural areas
- Raising awareness of the dangers of veld and forest fires
- Highlighting the vital role of trees in our lives by organizing a variety of greening events
- Encouraging everyone to participate in tree planting and greening activities because of the benefits of trees not only to the economy, but also to the environment – for example trees protect the soil, and they improve air quality.

Our previous campaigns during Arbor Week focused on:

1. Greening: Where communities and schools were encouraged to participate in tree planting and greening programmes for beautification and improvement of their immediate environment.
2. Commercial value of trees: Where the benefit that are derived from making products out of trees such as paper, planks and medicines where highlighted. It also emphasized the employment and business opportunities provided by trees and Forests.
3. 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.
4. 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

### **3. Forestry in the Eastern Cape**

Ladies and Gentlemen, over the past few years work has been done to increase forestry in the Eastern Cape.

A year ago, the previous Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry announced the launch of the Strategic Environmental Assessment for Forestry in the Eastern Cape. This study has now been concluded as the first step in the Department's programme for the development of the forestry sector in the Eastern Cape.

The study has confirmed that the Eastern Cape Province has potential for at least 100 000 hectares (ha) of new plantation forestry. This shall be developed over a 10 to 20 year period and will require close collaboration between National and Provincial Government Departments, Traditional Leaders, Local Government and Communities, and the Forestry Industry. My Department is working very closely with these partners to roll out the implementation of this programme.

Development of this potential will create 5 000 new jobs on plantations in the province and will generate returns of R500 million per annum for participating communities. The added benefit of this opportunity is that the creation of additional timber resource will attract value-adding and processing industries, which will also employ people in the future. It is important to recognise that the majority of this development will take place in rural areas and will directly impact on the lives of rural people. This programme should create new opportunities for our people, and we look forward to seeing the results of this work in the development of the Eastern Cape economy. Already in five villages around Qunu my Department has planted between 600 and 700 trees.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Eastern Cape Province has a wealth of indigenous forest resources, high in biodiversity. My Department is making a concerted effort to make the benefits of forests and trees accessible to all our people. The Participatory Forest Management Programme is one such initiative to involve local people; women, men, and the youth in the management of their natural resources. Unless we look after our natural resources – our trees, forests, soil and water – our children will not be able to share in the benefits. My Department encourages local communities to get involved with the sustainable utilisation and management of the forests in their areas. And we will be running workshops in October this year to share information with communities on what activities are allowed in both the indigenous forests and plantations.

#### **4. Forest Fires**

Programme Director, the issue of veld and forest fires is of great concern to me. Not only do wild fires threaten and destroy our forests and agricultural resources, but they also threaten the lives of our people. I am calling on all stakeholders and communities to make the control of fires a priority. While we are spending resources on developing new forests, the existing plantations are under threat from uncontrolled burning and arson. It is estimated that annually the veld and forest fires cost the economy R3 to R5 billion. This will result in job losses and withdrawal of investment in the province, unless the situation is brought under control.

My Department has an active unit that assists farmers, forestry companies and communities to establish Fire Protection Associations in an attempt to proactively address this problem. My appeal goes out to all authorities and community leaders to communicate this as a matter of urgency to their constituencies.

#### **5. Forestry associated industry**

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important that you are aware that over and above the contribution of commercial plantations; forests and trees offer a wide range of benefits and opportunities for local economic development. My Department is currently undertaking an assessment of all forestry enterprises in the Province. This extends to include charcoal production, roadside firewood merchants, sawmills, woodcrafts and forest-based tourism activities. This information will be captured in forestry reports for all District Municipalities, as a basis for developing a forestry sector development plan, which will become part of municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Forestry has long been neglected as a means of achieving local economic development and needs to change. With the support of all stakeholders in the region, forestry can contribute to creating a better life for our people.

#### **6. Conclusion**

To conclude, I would like to emphasise that forests and trees play an important role in sustaining the livelihoods of the poorest of the poor, as well as in creating wealth and jobs for the nation. The Eastern Cape is a region that is now recognised as being of national importance in the future development of the forestry sector. I call on all leaders, Government officials and communities to work together to make this a reality and a success in the Eastern Cape. Let's plant a tree and grow the future of the Eastern Cape.

Finally, I dedicate this tree that we are planting today in honour of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, who has inspired our nation and the world with his vision, his leadership, and his commitment to the people of South Africa.

I thank you.