

**Launch of Arbor Week 2007**  
**Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Ga-Rankuwa Unit 21 Park, Ga-Rankuwa, Gauteng**  
**1 September 2007**

President Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa  
Dr Gwen Ramokgopa, Executive Mayor of Tshwane  
Members of the Mayoral Committee  
Chief Executive Officer of TOTAL South Africa  
Councillors  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to be here and join the community of Ga-Rankuwa to enjoy the first day of spring, and celebrate the planting of trees and greening this area as part of our launch of Arbor Week 2007. I am particularly pleased that our President has been able to join us. Mr President your presence here gives enormous weight to our campaign and efforts to green South Africa.

There are many ways in which trees contribute and add value to our daily lives: be they environmental, economic or social; however often we do not understand trees and cannot always see the benefits that they bring. It is therefore necessary for all of us to learn more about our environment and start recognising the importance that trees play in so much of our lives, and the benefits these trees planted today will bring to future generations.

To create awareness about trees and to focus our nation's attention on planting and looking after trees we hold our annual Arbor Week, which is celebrated in South Africa every year during the first week of September. For South Africa, Arbor Week (and Arbor Day before that) dates back to the early 1970's, however its existence goes back more than 130 years when J Sterling Morton of Nebraska in the United States, proposed in 1872 that a public holiday called Arbor Day be celebrated by the State of Nebraska. In 1874, Arbor Day was celebrated for the first time in that State and from this humble beginning it grew to become a festival celebrated throughout the world. The motivation for planting trees all those years ago – to provide protection from the wind, prevent soil erosion and beautify the environment – have not changed significantly from the needs today, however we now recognise that trees offer a number of other benefits.

The spirit and character on display today in Ga-Rankuwa, and the favourable reaction to our tree planting efforts by the community here, exemplify the purpose of National Arbor Week. And I am sure that it was this same spirit that was the motivational force behind the work of Mr Morton so many years ago.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this year's Arbor Week is a bit different from what has come before – because now we are shifting our efforts to a much higher level through the campaign that President Mbeki is launching with us today – our campaign to plant a million trees a year, the majority of them fruit trees. Our campaign is a call to action for all citizens, organizations and institutions; for them to make a contribution in their areas and to green our country. Importantly, these trees when they bear fruit will provide us with visible and real benefits to our lives.

One of the other focuses of the campaign and our Greening Strategy is to uplift areas which were neglected by the previous government, while maintaining and protecting trees and other elements of greening in areas where they already exist. We are also looking forward to showcasing our beautiful country to the rest of the world during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, can you imagine how good our country will look after planting millions of trees.

The campaign we are running in South Africa is part of a broader global effort to increase tree planting as a means to dealing with food security and climate change, with the United Nations running a global *Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign*, which is encouraging people and governments across the world to increase the number of trees that they plant.

Honourable President, ladies and gentlemen in developing our Greening Strategy for the country we have recognised the importance of partnerships – which must include Local Government, the private sector, Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations and other role players. I believe that we have started on the right note with the greening of this area, which has been done in partnership with National, Provincial and Local Government and well as Non-Governmental Organisations and Community Based Organisations. I want to congratulate the Community in this area for participating in this greening initiative and for showing concern and care about the environment.

I would like to see a great deal more involvement in greening initiatives from the side of the private sector. We have approached a number of companies and we look forward to them coming on board. Those companies that negatively impact on the environment have an added duty to join our greening initiatives.

Companies that already support greening efforts such as TOTAL South Africa, who have been very generous in their contribution are highly appreciated, and should be commended.

I would also like to thank Rand Water for their support today and look forward to their future involvement in our tree planting and greening campaign.

Finally, I would like to thank the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality for hosting this launch event in partnership with my Department. I must thank the officials of my Department and those in the Tshwane Municipality who organized this event.

**"Plant a Tree - Grow our Future".**

Ke a leboga.