

**Arbor Week 2007 Western Cape Event**  
**Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Heideveld Park, Cape Town**  
**6 September 2007**

MEC of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning  
Chairperson and members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry  
Councillors  
Members of the Heideveld Community  
Programme Director  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to be here in Heideveld as part of our National Arbor Week celebrations, and to join this community in its efforts to improve this area through the planting of trees. It is encouraging that these greening efforts are being done as a partnership with a number of different stakeholders which include National, Provincial, and Local Government, as well as community based organisations such as the Great Commission United and the Just Do It Foundation.

Ladies and gentlemen, Arbor Week is celebrated annually from 1 to 7 September; its purpose is to focus our attention on the importance of trees in our daily lives and to raise awareness about the need to plant and protect existing trees. The spirit and character on display today in Heideveld seems to exemplify the foundational purpose of our celebration of National Arbor Week. I am sure that it was this same spirit that was the motivational force behind the work of J Sterling Morton of Nebraska in the United States, who 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.

It is a celebration that was changed in South Africa from one day to a week at the request of numerous stakeholders involved in environmental issues in this country; they felt that one day was not enough to celebrate trees and to tell people about the importance of trees. Arbor Week should be regarded as the culmination of what has been done throughout the year to plant, care and maintain existing trees.

The theme for this year's Arbor Week is **"Plant a Tree - Grow our Future"**. In this year's campaign we are calling all citizens, organizations, institutions and the Private Sector, as well as you the learners to action and making a contribution in their respective areas to green South Africa.

Last Saturday on the 1 September President Mbeki launched our Arbor Week and the "Trees for Food Programme". At the launch event, which took place in Ga-Rankuwa, Tshwane, the President spoke about how even a visitor to South Africa could easily tell which areas were the former 'whites only' suburbs – it is clearly visible by the trees. What is important to us is that we address that negative legacy and plant trees across all areas and beautify our communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the benefits of trees extend far beyond our immediate environment as they help to absorb carbon dioxide, which is one of the main contributors to global warming and climate change. Our efforts to increase the number of trees planted are but one of the measures we are taking to mitigate the impact of climate change, and contributes to protecting our planet for future generations. As part of its response to climate change the United Nations has a global target of planting a billion trees, and with our campaign South Africa will contribute to meeting this target and helping our planet.

Trees are also important because they provide benefits in preventing soil erosion, and the protection they provide us from the wind. One must also not forget the importance of trees for medicinal purposes, and the many economic benefits and industries that exist because of trees as well as the social activities that take place around trees. Trees provide important habitats for survival of birds, animals and insects. Additionally our indigenous trees form an important part of tourist attraction areas and making South Africa a beautiful country.

This year we have started a programme to plant at least a million trees a year. This campaign will in no small measure contribute significantly to improving the landscape of South Africa, and making our country even more beautiful. Planting a million trees this year and every year for the foreseeable future will require a massive effort by all of us to plant trees on this scale.

Through this programme we hope that every school child should be taught about the importance of trees and the many benefits they provide, and be given the opportunity to plant and nurture their own trees be it at

home or at school. Every clinic, school, business, household, place of religion, and government institution should be planting trees. We are also encouraging the private sector, both big businesses and small, to sponsor trees for their local community.

This programme will be rolled-out and implemented country-wide and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has prepared a planting programme and schedule which will indicate where future plantings of these million trees will take place throughout the country. Special emphases will be given to the poverty nodal points and schools, early learning centres, old age homes and other public institutions will be targeted.

An important part of our tree planting efforts are focusing on fruit trees because in addition to the many other benefits that trees bring, by planting fruit trees we are also able to contribute directly to improving people's lives.

Through this programme we will make sure that in the Western Cape 110 000 trees will be planted in this financial year, of which 70 % will be fruit trees and the remaining 30% are ornamental/indigenous trees. The majority of these trees will be planted largely at peoples homes (about 60%), the remaining 40% will be planted at schools. And we will be focusing our efforts on the historically disadvantaged areas.

Programme Director, in Heideveld we will be planting 800 fruit trees and have been working with the Great Commission United and the Just Do It Foundation who are our local partners. We will be planting about another 200 indigenous trees, of which one is the Cape Ash species, along this very park and sidewalks. We have also agreed with the Cape Town City Parks that they will be 'our eyes and ears' in maintaining these trees (pruning, irrigation and so forth). But to really make a difference we need the full and active participation of our communities, particularly our learners.

Today we are joined by the members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry. Their presence sends out a message that our Parliament cares about planting trees and the environment. And I hope that through their participation in today's event these Members of Parliament will take the message to their own constituencies across the country and be part of our national effort to plant more trees and care for existing trees.

In conclusion programme director, Arbor Week and other initiatives of my Department will not be successful without the participation of our stakeholders and partners. I would like to thank all of them for their support; in particular our corporate sponsor TOTAL South Africa for supporting Arbor Week for all these years. We also thank you for coming on board regarding support for the Trees for Food Programme. Your efforts and contribution in this regard are highly appreciated.

I would like to thank the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality for hosting this important event in partnership with my Department and the Great Commission United and the Just Do It Foundation. I would like to also thank the Municipality for their efforts in extending greening to historically disadvantaged areas, in particular to the Heideveld community.

I thank you.