

Bucket Eradication Programme launch
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Sundays River Valley Local Municipality, Eastern Cape
13 December 2007

MEC
Members of Parliament
Members of the provincial legislature
Mayors, Councillors, Community Leaders
SALGA representatives
Representatives of non-governmental organisations and community based organisations
Government officials
Programme Director
Ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to be here today and join the community of Paterson to celebrate the removal of buckets in this area, and to talk to you about the successes we have achieved across the country in our bucket eradication programme. The bucket system can only be described as demeaning for those who have been required use this system and the eradication of buckets is something that we can be proud of.

One of the biggest challenges that we have faced as the democratic government has been the need to provide our people with even the most basic infrastructure that the Apartheid State denied us. While the backlog still remains significant we have done very well since 1994 to address the needs of our people. In 2005 we found that over 250 000 buckets were still being used in settlements established before 1994, and we embarked on a massive campaign to rid the country of these buckets and replace them with adequate and decent sanitation.

President Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address in 2006 announced that "government has decided that we must completely eradicate, in the established settlements, the 'bucket toilets' by the end of 2007".

During this year's State of the Nation Address the President confirmed our progress on the eradication of buckets when he said: "We are proud that within one year, we have been able to reduce the backlog in the eradication of the bucket system in established settlements by almost half. We are on course to put an end to this dehumanising system in these areas by the end of this year. We will continue to confront these challenges so as to erase in our country that which is ugly and repulsive so that together we can speak of freedom and the happiness that comes with liberty."

We have done well and are close to achieving this target. By the end of this year almost 95% of the buckets that were in use in settlements established prior to 1994 would have been removed and replaced with adequate sanitation. By March next year all of these buckets would have been removed. The remarkable progress has been made is indeed something to be proud of.

Earlier this week we joined the world in celebrating International Human Rights Day. This day formed part of our 16 days of activism for no violence against women and children. In December 1948 the United Nations adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights to promote Human Rights, and to recognize the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all members of the human family, which is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Article 22 of this Human Rights declaration talks about the need for governments to use their resources towards the creation of dignity for members of society. By eradicating this 'dehumanising' bucket system we are making an important contribution to improving people's lives and giving them dignity.

When the President made the announcement that all buckets in established formal areas should be removed by December 2007, we saw municipalities, Provincial Government and National Government put in a great deal of extra effort to ensure these buckets were removed and give our people more dignity. When we talk about our government being a caring government, we can see it from the effort that officials at all levels put into this programme to ensure that the target is met. From all spheres of government we have embraced this challenge with the seriousness and zeal it deserves. We have seen the political support and commitment starting from the

President through myself as Minister, to the Premiers, MECs of Local Government, Mayors, and councillors. We must also recognise the effort put in by the contractors who were working on the construction of new sanitation systems. This programme is a good example of how much we as a nation can achieve if we work together.

Honourable Mayor, I would like to congratulate all those who have been involved in the programme to eradicate the buckets in this area; in particular I would like to commend this municipality for making the promise of improving the lives of our community a reality. Halala Sundays River Municipality Halala!!

Ladies and Gentlemen, to get to this point it has been a long hard road and we have faced many challenges along the way. I am therefore very proud of the achievement of this municipality and of all other municipalities in this province that have met this target. From across the country there are only eight municipalities in three provinces that will not meet the December target and I am aware that they are working overtime in order to complete the removal of their buckets as soon as possible. In the Eastern Cape the remaining 1316 buckets are in Doodrecht and Indwe, in the Chris Hani municipality and will be removed early in the New Year.

While we celebrate our success here today we must be reminded of the many challenges that still remain with us, and the many people who are living in informal settlements that will still need to use buckets until they are provided with housing that will have sanitation. I must make it clear that the focus of our campaign to eradicate buckets has been on the established settlements, and not informal settlements. So while we are saying that we have eradicated buckets in these established areas, we are aware that there are communities living in informal settlements that are still using this inhumane system. Our job does not end until we can confidently say that all people in this country have access to decent sanitation.

Bucket eradication is not the only target for my department. At the same time as we have been removing the buckets we have also been working on ensuring that all clinics in the country without any water and sanitation services receive these services by end of December 2007. I am delighted to announce that this target will be met, already about 97% of the work has been completed throughout the country.

Another critical target for us is to provide access to water for all of our people. I am aware that this is a major challenge for the Eastern Cape, and even in this area there are regular shortages of water. My Department has noted the need to increase the water supply to this municipality and municipalities in the surrounding areas, and we are working with the municipality to find the best ways of doing so.

Even when we are able to increase the water supply, we must remember that South Africa is a water scarce country and we must use our water sparingly. Water is precious and we have to treat it with absolute care. Until this additional water is brought in, the community will have to be extra vigilant in how you use water.

Last week I launched our National Water Conservation pilot programme at an event in the Free State. This pilot programme is being run in eight municipalities from around the country, where the municipalities are being supported to implement a number of measures to save water. These measures include: a Waterwise Campaign to make people more aware of the scarcity of water; technical interventions to repair leaks, replace the old plumbing that uses too much water, and installing devices that can save water; economic tools such as pricing and incentives; and bylaws on the use of water. In launching this programme I made the point that through water conservation programmes not only do we end up saving water and money for the municipality but we also create employment opportunities for community members who provide plumbing as well as leak detection and repair services.

The municipalities that have removed buckets will need to find alternative employment for the staff that were previously involved in collecting and sanitising the buckets, and it may be possible for them to receive training in basic plumbing or other sanitation related skills and be redeployed in these areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen communities must also play their role and look after the infrastructure and new toilet facilities, and I urge you to do so. Please ensure that they are kept in good working condition, repair leaks in your homes and report any leaks in the street to the municipality. I also encourage the municipality to implement an operation and maintenance plan that is community based.

Mayor, should you require it, my regional office is available to give support to the municipality to implement a water conservation programme as well as a groundwater management programme.

I am aware that municipalities face a number of challenges in contributing to the targets as well as delivering on their day to day responsibilities. Such challenges may include accessing the MIG allocations, ability to attract technical expertise (particularly to rural areas), the development of bulk schemes, and security of water resources, amongst others. My department has been working with municipalities to address these challenges, and in recognition of our efforts we have won for the second year in succession the Vuna Award for our continued and exemplary support to local government.

To conclude ladies and gentlemen, the replacement of buckets with decent sanitation systems is a reason to celebrate. The success we have achieved in the bucket eradication programme has laid a solid foundation for meeting our target to provide water and sanitation to all in the country. We have seen the impact we can make by working together, and we need to build on the momentum created so far and ensure that commitment and focus required to meet these remaining targets are not lost. The importance of effective leadership cannot be overemphasized as we move towards meeting the water and sanitation targets. I am sure I can rely on this municipality to again show excellence when it comes to these targets.

In closing, I will like to reiterate the commitment of my Department to assist the municipalities in this area to source funding and ensure that water supply is improved and is sustainable. We are committed to creating a better life and giving people their dignity by being able to access these basic services; we have not forgotten the rural poor and other communities who have been waiting patiently for the better life promised them. As government, we stand by our commitment to ensure that water and sanitation become a reality.

I thank you.