

**2008 Arbor Week Launch Event**  
**Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Lamontville, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal**  
**25 August 2008**

Programme Director  
The Mayor of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality  
Chairperson of Total South Africa  
CEO of Mondi Business paper  
Councillors  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here in Lamontville to celebrate the launching of our 2008 Arbour Week Campaign; a campaign which will see over two thousand five hundred trees being planted in this community. Already we have seen more than a thousand trees being planted here with the remainder being planted over the next few days. Trees bring so many benefits to our lives that it is important for us to dedicate a week every year, during the first week of September, to reflect on the value of trees and to renew our commitment to planting trees.

Planting of the trees here in Lamontville forms part of the eThekweni Municipality's Clean and Green Campaign, which we have heard about; and it also forms part of a national campaign to plant at least one million trees every year. Honourable Mayor, Councillor Mlaba, I wish to congratulate you for initiating the clean and green programme within eThekweni. In acknowledging these efforts it is therefore appropriate that we launch the Arbour Week Campaign in Lamontville, which is one of the identified project areas for the Clean and Green Campaign. Mayor Mlaba my Department is committed to support the wonderful work undertaken by the municipality in this area, which we have seen during our drive through Lamontville this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, last year President Mbeki launched the Million Trees Programme, which is aimed at planting at least a million trees annually with 70% being fruits and 30% ornamental shade trees. At the launch the President spoke about his childhood experience of growing up with plumb and other fruit trees, and his concern that the rural areas and townships of our country do not have sufficient trees. He explained that even overseas visitors can easily tell which areas are the former white suburbs and which are townships just by looking at where there are trees. We need to change that and in doing so we are also planting fruit trees so that our communities would in time be able to benefit from the fruit.

The launch last year saw my Department and the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality planting 2300 trees in Ga-Rankuwa extension 21. I am pleased to announce that 90% of the trees are still surviving and the community there is happy and enjoying the green environment of Ga-Rankuwa.

Programme Director, since the launch of the Million Trees Programme Government Departments, Municipalities, Schools, Community Based Organisations, Non-Government Organisations and the Corporate Sector have been making a contribution to the programme; and I am pleased to announce that to date my Department and other stakeholders have together planted over one million seven hundred thousand trees. These include trees planted in homesteads, streets, parks, public places and rehabilitation projects across the country.

Today we are celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first National Arbour Day held in South Africa. We have come a long way since the beginning of this programme in 1983, and today we can be proud that we have transformed the planting of trees into an activity and a priority for all the communities in South Africa. If we continue to plant trees in our townships, rural areas and community spaces at the rate we are doing and with the same success as this past year, we will change the landscape of our country. It is very pleasing for me to see how our communities are becoming involved in greening the environment and removal of waste in the areas in which they live; if sustained, this work will bring dignity to the community and our surroundings.

Over this past year of tree planting and the successes that have been achieved shows that we are entering a new phase of greening in our country. Our achievements and our continued running of this campaign have attracted international interest and new partners that are very excited to join us to support our efforts.

Our tree planting programme, in particular the planting of fruit trees, is also linked to other well known programmes of government aimed at poverty eradication. These are programmes such as food and nutrition programmes of the Departments of Agriculture and Health.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, as we launch Arbour Week today, we must be aware that planting trees is more than just for the benefits of their fruit, to provide shade, prevent soil erosion and beautify our environment; planting trees also contributes mitigating against the most threatening phenomenon of our lifetime, which is global climate change and in particular global warming. This phenomenon is an environmental threat that all of us are facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Planting trees is one of the most important mitigating factors against climate change because trees are our 'green lungs' that breathe in the emissions of carbon dioxide and release oxygen thereby slowing down this environmental threat. Our theme for this year's Arbour week is therefore "Plant Trees – Save our planet". This theme is in line with and in support of the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) worldwide tree planting campaign; Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign.

The need to plant more and more trees is increasing by the day if we want to slow down the tide of climate change. If we are to successfully counteract the effects of global warming and toxic emissions resulting from the continued industrialisation and other pollutants, we need to create offsets by planting more trees and conserving more forests. This calls for a collective responsibility by all South Africans, individuals and organisations to join hands in greening our country.

Programme director, another aspect of tree planting is the forestry industry, which in South Africa and particularly in this province has built itself into a highly successful, competitive and sustainable sector and a world player. Often forestry is an industry which is not fully appreciated, and we need to recognise its contribution to environmental, social and economic development of our country. The economic benefits which forestry brings to this country are clear: it ranks amongst South Africa's foremost export industries, contributing no less than R14 Billion every year to the country which constitutes a significant contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

We are continuing to strengthen this industry through Afforestation, in other words planting trees for commercial purposes where there were none before. The focus will be on KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces. In order to ensure the participation of black people in the Forestry industry, the Broad-Based BEE Charter was signed by role players in the forestry sector in May this year. The Charter makes certain commitments and set targets for empowerment to be achieved within 10 years.

Before concluding we must acknowledge the challenges faced by the forestry industry, particularly as a result of forestry fires. Last year the industry was devastated by massive fires that saw an estimated 100 000 ha of forests and commercial plantations being burnt, along with the loss of lives, homes and property. The dry weather this season and winds over the past few days have seen a resurgence of fires. It was reported that over the weekend there were 33 fires and by last night 18 of them had been brought under control. There are still fires raging on in plantations as we speak here today. Our Working on Fire programme has deployed numerous teams of fire-fighters to the affected areas as well as planes to drop water. Every year these young men and women risk their lives to fight these fires and protect communities and property. I commend them and the excellent work they are doing.

In conclusion, Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, the task of planting and maintaining trees cannot be government's responsibility alone. There is a need for all sectors of society to make a contribution to protecting our environment and greening our country. I call on everyone; individuals, community organisations, schools and all companies (big, medium and small) to join my Department and government in general to green the country. Every South African must make a contribution to the greening of their country and as we launch Arbour Week I am calling on everyone to plant at least one tree this Arbour Week.

Every Arbor Week celebration highlights two or three specific trees. The trees are selected from commonly found trees species and the rare tree species. For 2008 the following three tree species have been selected as trees of the: The *Harpephyllum caffrum* (The Wild Plum) which is a commonly found tree in the country, the *Diospyros whytea* (Bladder-nut) and the *Markhamia zanzibarica* (Nell Bean tree) are very rare in South Africa today. We encourage people to plant these trees at various places so that they are not lost to us and future generations.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the partnership between my Department and TOTAL South Africa who have supported Arbour Week over the past ten years, and are now also supporting the Million trees Programme. They not only give us funding (which we always appreciate), but also give generously of their time in planning the campaign. We appreciate their involvement and generosity. I would also like to call on the corporate sector and other donors to join hands with government to ensure the greening and beautification of our country, and protection of the environment.

A word of appreciation must also go to Mondi Business Paper who have contributed immensely to the success of today's event. We hope that this will be the beginning of a partnership journey between yourself and my Department in making a greener South Africa.

Lastly, but not least I would like to thank the eThekweni Municipality for launching the Clean and Green Campaign and for your participation in preparations for the national launch event.

Thank you to the members of the community and everyone who graced this event through their presence and participation.

I Thank You.