

Arbor City Award Prize-Giving Ceremony
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Ga-Segonyana Municipality, Northern Cape
9 October 2008

Mayor of the Kgalagadi District Municipality; Ms Sarah Mereotle
Executive Mayor of Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality, Ms Seitebaleng Mabilu;
Councillors present here today,
The President of the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management; Mr Thembi Ngcobo;
Representatives of our sponsors: Total, Malanseuns, and Professional Irrigation Agencies
Traditional leaders
Distinguished guests;
Programme Director
Ladies and gentlemen;

It is an honour to be here in Kuruman in the Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality to acknowledge the achievements of the municipality in the greening of this area. I am especially pleased to be here during Weedbuster Week and to celebrate this week with the community of Kuruman.

More than ever before we have recognised the importance and benefits of planting trees for our communities; and as a result we reintroduced the Arbor City Awards in 2002. Through these awards we are supporting and encouraging the efforts of our Local Municipalities to green their areas of jurisdiction.

Our greening efforts and the planting of trees come with significant benefits to the environment; they help to mitigate the impact of climate change, beautify the area, have medicinal value, provide fruit, and provide economic opportunities. In areas with very hot climates like Ga-Segonyana, trees provide shade, and improve the microclimate by having a cooling effect. Furthermore during dusty months, trees help to trap dust particles and help with purification of the air that we breathe. Ladies and gentlemen, the list is endless, but in the end trees and other vegetation provides us with a dignified environment, which we can all be proud of.

Because of these many benefits of trees they should be important to all of us, no matter our age, background, race, class, or interests. Earlier this week at a function to celebrate Weedbuster Week in the Western Cape when I looked out at the audience I saw young children, workers, Rastafarians, traditional healers, and the rainbow nation of our country. I noted this diverse audience and saw how nature and support for the environment brings so many different communities and interests together.

It is sad then, when one thinks of our past and how the Apartheid government in its efforts to divide communities, reinforced the group areas by favouring certain communities and areas with tree planting. Last year at the launch of our Arbor Week former President Mbeki spoke about the lack of trees in our townships and rural areas, and pointed out that even a visitor to South Africa could easily tell which areas were the former 'whites only' suburbs, as they are clearly visible by the surrounding greenery. It is very important that we address the ills of the past legacy through tree planting and other forms of greening, and for communities in South Africa to recognise the importance and benefits of the environment and take collective responsibility for looking after and improving the environment. My Department along with our sponsors and other organisations have a number of greening initiatives, but to really green our country and make a real impact we also need the involvement of all institutions, private sector and ordinary citizens in these greening efforts.

The first greening effort I would like to mention is the reason we are here today – the Arbor City Awards. These awards provide incentives and recognise Municipalities who are doing their best in terms of greening, especially in the previously disadvantaged areas. We have as a result made great strides in recent years to expand the greening of our municipalities from the past focus on towns and suburbs to also include our townships.

Secondly, we have our Arbor Week which is aimed at creating awareness amongst communities about the importance of trees, and to encourage people to plant indigenous trees throughout the country. Arbor Week takes place every year from 1-7 September and we hold a number of events during that week. Arbor Week is seen as the peak of all our tree planting efforts during the year. The first Arbor Day in South Africa was celebrated in 1983 when it was initiated as part of the Green Heritage Campaign. In 1996 the then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Prof. Kader Asmal, recognised the need to emphasise the importance of greening, and extended Arbor Day to Arbor Week. We now have a proposal to extend our Arbor Week to a whole month. Because of the positive impact that planting trees has on the environment our theme for our recent Arbor Week was "Plant trees-Save our planet".

The third initiative I would like to talk about is the million trees campaign. This campaign was launched during Arbor Week last year by our former President, Thabo Mbeki, and is aimed at planting at least a million trees each year both for beautification (to create an aesthetically pleasing environment) and to provide communities with fruit, as many of the trees that we plant under this initiative are fruit trees. Since that programme was launched last year we have by far exceeded our target by planting over one million seven hundred thousand trees. I am looking forward to us being even more successful this year and even more partners coming on board to support our tree planting efforts.

The last initiatives to support greening that I would like to address today are the WeedBuster Week and the Working for Water programme. We are celebrating Weedbuster Week this week to draw attention to the problem of alien invasive plant species, which displace local vegetation, consume too much water, and negatively impact on the environment. During this week we have held events throughout the country to raise awareness of the need to remove alien invasive species and to plant indigenous plants instead. It is critical that when we embark on our greening campaigns that we use indigenous species, and to highlight that our theme for this year's Weedbuster Week is "Plant me instead".

Our Working for Water programme, which was established 13 years ago, has been highly successful in removing invasive alien species and in many places planting indigenous species to replace the invasives. The programme has grown in size, budget and impact, and to date has freed up between forty eight million and fifty six million cubic metres of additional water for alternative uses annually. It employs over thirty thousand people to remove these invasive species. However in spite of our efforts the challenges of alien invasive species still remains a huge challenge that requires even more effort.

If we are successful in all of these initiatives and involve as many people as possible in our greening efforts and planting indigenous vegetation, we will go a long way to changing the landscape of our country and to mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Programme Director, Ladies and gentlemen I would like to congratulate our winner of the Arbor City Award Competition in the Northern Cape for their achievement in greening their municipality. I am informed that the panel judges have been consulting extensively and have maintained a high level of objectivity in the competition. Not only was the process consultative, but it also included visits to the cities and towns to conduct an inspection of the greening interventions on the ground. The judging criteria was based on, among others, the conservation and protection of existing trees and the general attractiveness of the town with trees as the main feature. Also important is the percentage of indigenous trees that have been planted, as well as, the plans to plant trees in the townships over the next five years.

Honourable Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, I am informed by the adjudicators that this year's competition was very challenging and that out of a total of ten competing municipalities, Ga-Segonyana Local Municipality emerged as the winner. I must mention that your Municipality gained the edge over the others because of the efforts in greening the townships that fall under this municipality. The judges were particularly impressed by the way the greening interventions were implemented, by involving communities and ensuring full participation by the recipients of greening services. Such involvement is a positive move by your Municipality because it recognises that greening is of benefit to all of us, and you are congratulated for that. You have shown your commitment towards the creation of liveable and dignified settlements for your communities in your area of jurisdiction.

Honourable Mayor, councillors, and council officials I hope that once you have received this substantial award of R200 000 (R100 000 from Total + R100 000 from DWAF) as well as the 4000 trees (1000 sponsored by Malanseuns, 1000 fruit trees from DWAF and 2000 ornamental trees from DWAF) to the value of R140 000, you do not stop the good work that you are doing to green your municipality and involve the community in these efforts. This award and recognition should be just the beginning and not the end of the greening process.

I would like to say to the community representatives and representatives from other sectors such as business and Non-Government Organisations: I invite you to join hands with government so that we can achieve our goal of greening the country. Government cannot do it alone and we need your involvement.

To the other municipalities present today, your participation in the competition shows the high level of commitment to provision of greening and other services to communities that you serve. Unfortunately there is only one municipality that can receive a prize in this competition yet by planting trees in your municipality and promoting greening we are all winners. Your efforts are noticed and I thank you for them.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Institute of Environment and Recreation Management for sustaining the partnership with my Department since the competition started. I would also like to thank the sponsors of

the competition, TOTAL South Africa, our corporate sponsor for Arbor Week; as well as Malanseuns and Professional Irrigation Agencies. Your continued support over the years is highly appreciated and we hope you will continue to do more in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you present here today for joining us in today's celebration with the winner of the Arbor City Awards 2008 Competition.

I thank you.