

Launch of National Sanitation Week 2008
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, Gauteng
26 May 2008

Programme Director
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Premiers
Members of the Portfolio Committee on Water and Forestry and on Health
MECs of Local Government and Housing
Executive Mayors
Councillors
Municipal Managers
Distinguished Guests, Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would like to welcome everyone to our launch event for South Africa's National Sanitation Week. With 2008 having been declared the International Year of Sanitation by the United Nations, we have taken a different focus during this year's sanitation week by holding this forum to look at our own commitments in the provision of sanitation to our people.

As we gather here today we are mindful of the recent distressing xenophobic attacks that have taken place across our country. These attacks cannot be justified and I join the many others who have condemned them. It has been reported that those who have participated in these barbaric acts are those who have not as yet received basic services and live in poverty. While one cannot use that as an excuse for what has happened it is important for those of us involved in provision of basic services that despite over 18.7 million more people having been given access to clean water and 10.9 million more people access to decent sanitation since 1994, there are still millions waiting for these services. Addressing these backlogs is a priority for us and we must continue to give hope to our people so that they do not engage in this type of destructive behaviour.

Programme Director, lack of access to basic services such as clean water and decent sanitation remains a global concern and the provision of these services as an important part of reducing poverty. In September 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce poverty and improve the health and well-being of our communities. It was however only in 2002, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg that sanitation was included as one of the MDGs. During the same year South Africa hosted the first Africa Sanitation and Hygiene Conference, which sought to highlight the strategic importance and benefits of provision of sanitation and to put mechanisms in place to accelerate the rate of delivery in Africa.

Unfortunately, the rate of delivery for many countries has been slow with capacity to deliver and financial support by donor countries having been identified as constraints in delivery - a challenge that was recognised during the 16th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 16) recently held in New York; where concerns were raised about African countries ability to meet the sanitation MDG. Whist South Africa was quoted as one of the countries that has met the target, only about 12 other countries are on track with on the sanitation MDG. Sub-Saharan Africa was identified as the most unlikely to meet the sanitation MDG by 2015.

Because of these challenges the need for a follow-up Africa Sanitation and Hygiene Conference was identified, in order to assess progress and to create greater awareness on the need to prioritise sanitation. To coincide with the International Year of Sanitation and the holding of regional sanitation events across the globe it was agreed to hold the second African Sanitation Conference during 2008. The intention of this AfricaSan event was to create a platform to focus on improving the scope and breadth of sanitation and hygiene services, and for countries to make commitments on the actions required to accelerate delivery to the required rate in order to meet the MDGs. This event was also used to call for external support from the United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to assist African governments achieve this target.

Again South Africa hosted the event which was held in Durban during February. The number of people that could attend the AfricaSan Conference had to be limited, with a strong focus on attendance by African Ministers in charge of sanitation and their relevant ministries; with some participation by professionals from the public and private sectors; and sanitation sector practitioners in civil society, external support agencies and research/training institutions as well as the media. Speakers at the event included those from relevant global and regional organizations who shared lessons and experiences in delivery of sanitation and hygiene services relevant to sub-Saharan Africa.

I am proud to say that South Africa had important lessons to share during the conference from our own valuable experiences in implementing our targets. I believe that we were also able to learn from the experience of other countries in Africa that have made significant strides in sanitation delivery, for example countries like Mozambique and Ethiopia.

One of the most important outcomes of this conference was that the delegates agreed on an Action Plan that articulates what needs to be done to put Africa "back on track" to meet the sanitation MDGs. It was agreed that the Action Plan needs to be further developed into national plans in each country. The African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) was mandated to monitor progress against the national plans and to report on achievements during the next AfricaSan meeting scheduled to take place in 2010. The commitments made were captured in what has been called: 'The eThekweni Declaration'.

All African Countries were requested to adopt this declaration, adapt the action plan to the local context, and for that plan to be submitted to the chairperson of the AMCOW by the end of June 2008.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to briefly list the key commitments made in Durban and discuss them as they apply to us:

1. To establish one national plan

In line with the commitment made in Durban, South Africa needs to put in place our own plan, and today's gathering along with the outcomes of previously held Provincial Summits and Bucket Eradication Summits will inform our action plan. The development of this plan is a key outcome of our gathering today and I am informed that our draft action plan was circulated prior to today.

This Draft Action Plan identifies the main areas of activity requiring attention at a national level, and poses issues that will need to be resolved today. This document will then be submitted to AMCOW in June and will be the basis for their assessment of South Africa's progress on achieving the targets we set ourselves.

2. To bring the messages, outcomes and commitments made at AfricaSan 2008 to the attention of the African Union

The discussions we had at the conference will need to be taken to the upcoming General Assembly of the African Union, which will be held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in July this year. The main focus of this Assembly will be on water and sanitation.

3. To support the leadership of AMCOW.

South Africa is proud to be an active member of this Council and it is up to all of us to strengthen its effectiveness. South Africa is scheduled to take the position of Chair of AMCOW during 2009.

4. To establish, review, update and adopt national sanitation and hygiene policies

South Africa is far advanced in having well established national sanitation and hygiene policies and regulations. My department in collaboration with SALGA and relevant sector departments have developed a 'sanitation tool' to inform people about our policies and legislation. This tool has recently been updated and is being rolled out to provinces and municipalities.

We also need to ensure that there are regular reviews of our policies to ensure that they meet the challenges that we face. One area that we still require more work on is the Free Basic Sanitation policy.

5. To increase the profile of sanitation and hygiene

Sanitation, even in South Africa, does not receive the attention it should. People often do not like to talk about such matters and consequently sanitation falls off the policy agenda. Fortunately over the past few years we have seen greater priority given to sanitation in South Africa. But I believe it is still not enough and it is our duty as stakeholders here to make more noise around sanitation issues and thereby raise the profile and make an impact.

6. To ensure that one, principle, accountable institution takes clear leadership

We found at AfricaSan that some African countries that still face the challenge of having sanitation fragmented across different ministries, which invariably leads to a lack of accountability on service delivery. South Africa has its own complexities with DWAF being responsible for national guidelines and policies, and with the delivery of sanitation services residing in local government and the budget allocations for sanitation infrastructure falling under MIG. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, as the sector leader, has over the years taken steps to collaborate much more closely with municipalities, provincial government and relevant national departments so that we can progress on a more coordinated basis.

7. To establish specific public sector budget allocations

One of the key objectives of the International Year of Sanitation is to ensure concrete funding commitments towards sanitation. In the Action Plan countries committed themselves to reaching a goal of spending of 0,5% of their GDP on sanitation. Through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) South Africa has funding allocated to sanitation, although the actual commitments made on sanitation and the expenditure patterns are not sufficient. This arises because the funding is in one “pot” and not ring-fenced for expenditure on sanitation with funds being prioritised on other items. We are calling for the sanitation budget within MIG to be ring-fenced so that sanitation can receive the priority that is necessary.

8. To use effective and sustainable approaches

Much as we are working tirelessly to achieve the targets, there are too many instances where infrastructure has been inappropriate and unsustainable due to the lack of a holistic approach in delivering these services. The issues of user education and hygiene education remain an important component of service delivery, and must be properly addressed on our sanitation programmes. I am particularly concerned with some of the projects implemented under the bucket eradication programme where there is already evidence of operation and maintenance challenges caused by poor practices. We have long recognised that for our interventions to be successful health and hygiene education must accompany the provision of infrastructure.

9. To develop and implement sanitation information, monitoring systems and tools

Effective monitoring systems influence our policies and inform our planning. There are a number of different data sources that we are using and it is becoming a priority that we align this information.

10. To recognise gender and youth aspects

Ensuring gender and youth participation in our sanitation programmes is a priority. Their interests are increasingly being taken into consideration in the implementation of sanitation solutions, with attention being given to job creation opportunities.

11. To build and strengthen capacity

A great deal of attention has been given to capacity constraints in the smaller municipalities. There are several initiatives targeting these municipalities and it is important that we improve our co-ordination of these support programmes.

12. To give special attention our neighbouring countries in need

With the experience that we have acquired over the years and as part of our commitment to NEPAD, South Africa should be strengthening the support we provide our neighbours. We foresee a greater demand for such support as we approach the MDG target date of 2015.

Programme Director, 'the eThekweni Declaration' and the adoption of our own Action Plan will serve to give greater attention to delivery of sanitation; and improve our capacity, resources and the alignment of our programmes in the sector so that we are able to make a meaningful impact in developing this sector, and deliver safe sustainable services to our communities. I am confident that our pledge will also facilitate the mobilization of the additional resources required to ensure that we are able to provide our communities with sanitation services.

Given our constitutional mandates the onus is on us to ensure that South Africa upholds these commitments. The role of Provincial and Local governments, the private sector and civil society with support from sector departments in realising these commitments is critical.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge the support given to this event by SALGA and the Rand Water Board not only as co-sponsors but also for your input and active participation as reflected by the programme, such partnerships are highly valued by my Department.

Thank you for your attendance and participation, as well as, your commitment to the efforts of government to address the plight of our communities and create a better life for all.