

Breakfast Meeting of the Plumbing Institute of South Africa
Speech by Mrs LB HENDRICKS, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Nasrec Exhibition Centre, Johannesburg
25 July 2008

Programme Director
Members of the Plumbing Institute of South Africa
Honourable Guests from our International Partners
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. Introduction

It is an honour to address you at this breakfast meeting of the Institute of Plumbing of South Africa. I am pleased to be meeting with representatives of the Plumbing Industry, and I thank you for inviting me to join you on this occasion. I would like to extend a special welcome to participants who have come from overseas and our neighbours from other African countries.

The issues being dealt with at this workshop such as improving standards to ensure the highest level of sustainability as well as water conservation, the improvement of the qualifications of practitioners, and the regulation of registered institute members are relevant not only to your industry but also to our national policy and programmes.

2. Provision of Water and Sanitation in South Africa

Programme Director, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has over the years developed a good working relationship with the plumbing fraternity and I am pleased to be able to support your event and your efforts to ensure compliance with standards, skills development, and to develop and grow the plumbing industry in South Africa. With over two point eight million more households having received sanitation services since 1994 and a further three point three million that will still receive sanitation services as we continue to roll out our sanitation programmes, there is a massive need to expand the number of plumbers that we have in this country. In terms of water we have seen even better performance with four point seven million more households having received access to water since 1994 and a backlog of one point three million households.

Our aim as government is to address this backlog of households without water and sanitation by 2014; so that by then we should have universal access to sanitation services across the country. The importance of a dynamic and growing plumbing industry therefore cannot be underestimated.

This massive increase in the number of households that now have water and sanitation, and with the numbers continually increasing it will require a competent, well regulated and significantly larger plumbing and related industry to address a growing demand. It is clear that government alone cannot respond to the needs of all these households that now have water and sanitation services. The private sector and typically small plumbing businesses will be called to provide services. What is important though is that you understand where the demand is, so that the industry is able to respond appropriately. For example much of the sanitation that we are currently providing as government has been in dry sanitation solutions such as Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines (VIPs) and more recently we are looking at improving on that technology by providing Urine Diversion and composting toilets. There is also a growing demand by communities for water borne sanitation and as households move up what we call the 'water services ladder' then piped water to households will become more common.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Department will continue to promote the delivery of dry sanitation services until all citizens have at least a basic level of service. These are not considered inferior services and should not be classified as inadequate. They require similar if not greater levels of good workmanship, innovation and creativity. In addition these systems require specific attention to operation and maintenance which in many cases is quite different from the conventional formal service delivery environment to which most of you are accustomed. I have been very pleased to see some industry players making particular innovations to meet the needs of this component of the sector; with ecologically friendly sanitation systems, appropriate water supply systems and water point terminals, and approaches to creating local jobs through decentralization of their factory assembly units and through use of local entrepreneurs.

The government has prioritized the alleviation of poverty and we are looking to all sectors to take actions to help create a better South Africa. The private sector has therefore been strongly encouraged to support these efforts through training, supporting new small enterprises, and providing mentorship to new entrants in the industry. The challenge of providing sustainable water services requires significantly more qualified contractors and suppliers than what we currently have available in our country, particularly to service the more remote areas. This provides opportunities for industry partners to make a contribution through training, mentoring, and regulating standards. To this end I would like to commend the initiatives of the Plumbing Institute to provide opportunities for small contractors to qualify and register as accredited contractors under their umbrella.

The provision of water and sanitation services is by no means a small industry and cost estimates to eradicate the backlogs, while difficult to specify, are estimated to require some R17bn for water supply infrastructure (internal services only), R25bn for sanitation infrastructure, and an additional R25bn for bulk regional infrastructure. That is a significant amount of money that will be required for the water and sanitation backlog over the next few years. Over and above that billions are going to be spent on water resource infrastructure such as dams, canals, pipelines, and other infrastructure as well as maintenance of that infrastructure.

It should be remembered that my Department acts as the custodian of the water resources of South Africa and also as the leader of the Water Sector. DWAF is also responsible to regulate the Sector in terms of water usage, service delivery and protection of our environment. Local Government, or more specifically Municipalities who are Water Service Authorities, are constitutionally responsible for the delivery of these water and sanitation services.

3. Water Conservation

Programme Director, in delivering water services infrastructure, we as a country are faced with a number of challenges, not least of which are the financial, technical capacity and water resource constraints.

People are prone to forget that South Africa is a water scarce country, and water conservation and water demand management should be key priorities of all of us – which has an impact on your industry. Water conservation is most definitely a priority for the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, and we will be putting greater emphasis and awareness creation on the need for water conservation by households, businesses, industry and agriculture. The technologies developed for use in households and by industry, alongside the advice given by the practitioners who are installing these technologies can make a huge difference to our water consumption patterns.

South Africa has a terrible history of what some in my department refer to as ‘apartheid plumbing’ where townships were fitted with poor quality plumbing infrastructure and households in these areas with inferior plumbing products that are prone to leaking and breaking down, which result in significant wastages of water. A few months after joining DWAF I visited an area not very far from where we are today, to witness these problems firsthand. As we embark on our water conservation and water demand management programmes so we must address this legacy and bring the services levels in townships to the same standards that we see in the suburbs.

Today we have high standards that have been set for the plumbing industry, and we are grateful that the Plumbing Industry is well organized and that standards for the industry are being applied through the maintenance of good material standards as well as standards of workmanship. We can ill afford the consequences of poor quality services which result in not only service interruptions for consumers, but also significant costs for municipalities and households.

4. International Year of Sanitation

Ladies and Gentlemen, this year we are celebrating the United Nations’ “International Year of Sanitation”; the aim of which is to bring greater attention to the two point six billion people estimated to be without sanitation and the impact of lack of decent sanitation on the lives, health and education potential of children who are more susceptible to missing school, illness and death as a result of poor sanitation conditions and lack of access to clean water.

The key messages from for the international year of sanitation are:

1. Sanitation is vital for health

2. Sanitation is a good economic investment
3. Sanitation is social development
4. Sanitation is helping the environment
5. Sanitation is achievable

An important objective of the International Year of Sanitation is to create awareness of the importance and positive impact of providing sanitation, and to create political commitment to addressing sanitation. Some of the political challenges faced in the past is that sanitation has not always been an area that has received sufficient attention by governments with the burden of sanitation and disposal of waste left to the individual or household.

South Africa has been very supportive of the International Year of Sanitation campaign and earlier this year we hosted AfricaSan 2008, which brought together representatives from African governments (approximately 42 countries represented and 35 Ministers attended), private sector organisations, NGOs and multilateral development organisations involved in the sector. The overall objective of AfricaSan 2008 was to assess progress made by African States, promote sanitation and hygiene improvement programmes in Africa, share best practice and lessons learned and identify actions to accelerate achievement of national and the MDG targets for sanitation.

Two of the key outputs of the conference were firstly, the formulation of an Action Plan to which all participating countries committed themselves. The plan focuses on strategic areas to improve the monitoring of sanitation and hygiene in the region and to accelerate sanitation and hygiene programmes regionally and in selected countries across the region. And secondly the generation of political commitment, embodied in a joint declaration referred to as the eThekweni Declaration. The declaration notes the negative impact of the lack of sanitation and the need to respond to this challenge by amongst other things:

- Governments establishing or updating their national policies and having one national plan to achieve the sanitation MDG.
- Governments having one accountable institution in the country that takes clear leadership of the national sanitation portfolio.
- Establish specific public sector budget allocations for sanitation, aimed at a minimum of 0.5% of GDP;

This declaration and these commitments were taken to the recent African Union Heads of State Summit held at Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt. At this summit Presidents and other heads of state held a four hour discussion on the many problems confronting water and sanitation in Africa and what needs to be done, they then made a number of commitments to addressing the water and sanitation challenges in their countries.

5. Conclusion

To conclude ladies and gentlemen, water supply and sanitation service delivery cuts across a number of sectors, and this workshop and exhibition brings together various role players and stakeholders from industry, as well as from government, state owned enterprises, NGOs and the private sector. What is important is for us to recognize the strength of combining our different interests and responsibilities in this sector, so that we are able to address the huge challenges in delivering safe and sustainable water services to our communities.

We are not in a fixed, stagnant environment; and so as individuals present here today, I encourage you to continually ask yourselves what is it that you can do differently to contribute to the improvement of service delivery processes in our respective workspaces.

I would like to impress upon your industry that we are most willing to partner with you to not only find innovative ways of accelerating delivery of water services affordably to all our communities, but also to maintain a high level of professionalism and integrity in the industry. May we strive to accomplish this in a way that maintains acceptable standards, conserves our precious water resources, raise the quality of life of the poorer members of our society through the provision of basic services, and promotes economic growth.

I thank you.