

Address to the SADC Water Ministers Meeting
Speech by Mrs LB HENDRICKS, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Mwanza, United Republic of Tanzania
6 November 2008

Guest of Honour, Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Dr Ali Mohamed Shein,
SADC Ministers and Deputy Ministers responsible for Water,
Permanent Secretaries and Directors-Generals,
Senior Officials,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning, Jambo, Habari, Sawubona, Molweni, Bon-journo, Bom dias, Salam Alaykum, Hola, Dumelang

It is an honour for us as South Africa to have the opportunity to chair this Ministerial meeting. I hope our contribution will make an impact in assisting SADC to achieve its objectives. I would like to thank the outgoing chair the Republic of Zambia for providing leadership over the past year.

Yesterday we were inspired by the words of Barack Obama. During his victory speech he spoke about defining moments in history and the mandate that the American people had given him, as the first African American President, to bring about change in a country that is facing huge challenges – economically, socially and in international relations. He spoke about the need for the people of America to work with him to bring about meaningful change, as the current situation is in so many ways not sustainable. Through inspirational leadership offered by Obama the possibility to achieve that vision is strong.

If ever the opportunity for an African Century was attainable, I believe that now is the time. And we as African Ministers of Water are at our own defining moment and we must show leadership to ensure that our people are provided with the basic services of access to water and sanitation, and all the related infrastructure that comes with the provision of these services. The attention given to matters of water and sanitation have never been greater. This year, the International Year of Sanitation, saw us holding the AfricaSan+5 conference in Durban; the first African Water Week in Tunisia; and the AU Head of State Summit in Sharm el Sheikh where water and sanitation were high on the agenda. Each of these meetings produced groundbreaking declarations that we need to implement.

As an incoming chair of the SADC Water Ministers Meeting, I acknowledge that we have a difficult task of not only building on gains made, but also to sharpen our focus on real issues that are affecting water and sanitation in the region. The achievement of the MDGs relating to water and sanitation remain critical. What makes our targets on water and sanitation a priority is that water is central to meeting other MDGs for example; poverty alleviation, health education, and even job creation.

In addition to the current challenges that we face as a region, there are new issues that are becoming more critical and urgent, the impending threat posed by climate change on the water resources and people in the region is a matter that should be put high on the SADC agenda. We also see that as we achieve greater levels of economic development and provision of sanitation to more of our people so the strain on the infrastructure and resulting pollution into our rivers and watercourses is a great concern, which must be addressed.

Honourable Vice President and Ministers, I believe it is necessary for SADC to evaluate progress made to date on our programmes and projects, and reflect on how we can improve on the implementation of these and future initiatives. We also have a responsibility to critically evaluate what we have identified as our priorities and ensure that these priorities speak to the challenges going forward. It is also my belief that we as SADC need to define and fund our own priorities. Whilst support from donor countries will always be appreciated, we need avoid over-reliance on donor funding so as not to compromise our ability to define our own priorities; and to ensure that donor funding is directed to our priority areas. I would therefore request that member countries contribute to both identification of priorities and the funding thereof.

Issues we must consider for inclusion onto the SADC Water agenda include:

1. Intensification of infrastructure development and water management programmes;
2. The implementation of programmes to clear alien invasive plant species throughout SADC;

3. Attainment of MDGs within SADC member countries;
4. Development of adaptation strategies for climate change.

I look forward to your response to these proposals.

In conclusion, honourable colleagues, as part of our determination to show leadership in the water sector, South Africa is submitting a bid to host the 6th World Water Forum in 2012. We have already been shortlisted along with France and Canada, and our final bid will be submitted in the next few days. We thank you for the overwhelming support we have received so far and success in hosting this prestigious water gathering will be a victory for SADC and the continent as a whole.

on behalf of the government of South Africa, we are determined to see that substantial progress is made in the water and sanitation sector across the SADC Region and in Africa as a whole, and we rely on your support to make our tenure as chair a success.

Finally, I would like to give my sincere thanks to Tanzania, the host country, for their hospitality and for the arrangements made to ensure a successful meeting. I would also like to thank the officials in the SADC secretariat for their hard work in co-ordinating this meeting.

I thank you!
Asante Sana!