

Taking over the chair-ship of AMCOW for the next two years
Acceptance Speech by Ms B Sonjica, Minister of Water and Environmental
Gallagher Estate, Midrand, Johannesburg
13 November 2009

YOUR EXCELLENCY AMCOW PRESIDENT BRUNO JEAN – RICHARD ITOUA

HONOURABLE MINISTERS

AMCOW TAC

AMCOW EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

COOPERATING PARTNERS

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENGLEMEN

Allow to begin on a rather sad note. Many of you will know or have heard of one of my predecessors in AMCOW, the former Minister Ronnie Kasrils. I am sad to announce the passing away of his beloved wife, Eleanor, who is being laid to rest today. Allow me to request that we all stand and observe a minute of silence.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Africa, it is once again my honour and privilege to address you during the 7th Ordinary Session of the African Ministers' Council on Water held in Midrand, Johannesburg. It is with a profound sense of humility that I take the floor to accept the honour that you have bestowed upon The Republic of South Africa in entrusting her with the Presidency of AMCOW.

As the South African Minister responsible for water it will be my singular honour to assume that role. You will no doubt bear with me if I do so with a sense of trepidation in view not only of the great responsibility that the role implies, but also due to the excellent manner in which my three predecessors acquitted themselves in this role. I speak of the founding Chair the Honourable Shehu Shagari of Nigeria who, among other things, was instrumental in securing the enduring offer of his country to host the Secretariat of AMCOW supported by substantial offers of financial support to the secretariat. He played a key role in mobilising confidence in the fledgling Council of Ministers through the establishment of lasting partnerships.

I recall the frontier charting work of my beloved sister, Maria Mutagamba whose milestone achievements include the establishment of the African Water Facility and the further strengthening of collaboration of AMCOW with external as well as internal African stakeholders; and of course my dear brother, Minister Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua, whose impressive record is contained in the impressive and comprehensive report we have just received.

All three have contributed in no small measure to the impressive record of achievements already recorded in addressing the challenges of poverty evidenced by the lack of adequate access to water and sanitation on our continent. Nonetheless I stand to solemnly declare our readiness and willingness to serve to the best of my ability.

We look forward to amplifying AMCOW as the authoritative voice for Water and Sanitation on the African continent. It is with a great sense of responsibility and pride that we accept this very important task.

Since its inception in 2002, the African Minister's Council on Water (AMCOW) has developed into a credible institutional mechanism for high-level policy coordination, political leadership, and advocacy for the development, protection, management, and judicious use of Africa's water resources.

As part of the new leadership of AMCOW, we will seek to carefully assess the achievements of the past seven years, explore ways to consolidate and upscale them and to identify the challenges that continue to hinder progress towards in achieving the African Water Vision 2025 of *"an Africa where there is an equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, regional cooperation, and the environment."*

Already African Heads of State have at the highest level demonstrated political commitment to the development of the water and sanitation sectors. Africa's water crisis and policy challenges are now broadly recognized as central to the continent's development agenda. Indeed the situation is dire with approximately 340 million Africans still lacking access to safe drinking water and 580 million are without basic sanitation.

These startling figures reflect Africa's continuing struggle on its path towards achieving the water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In fact, the gaps in target coverage in Africa remain the widest of any region in the world. Much of the problem stems from the continued inadequacy of water governance mechanisms throughout much of the continent.

Chair, it is evident that appropriate policy, legal, and institutional frameworks are lacking or deficient while technical capacity remains low. In the area of water and sanitation coverage, progress achieved is far too often outpaced by burgeoning population growth and unplanned migration. Similarly higher financial investments from both from sovereign and ODA sources are too often outstripped by rising demand. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that African countries are among the most vulnerable to the impending and uncertain impacts of climate change on water resources.

Our responsibility as Water Ministers is to provide the required leadership that will convert political will into action and implementation; emphasizing an objective of galvanizing political commitment in Africa and internationally to accelerate action in order to close the gap that remains for Africa to meet the MDG targets on water and sanitation.

It is therefore against this background that we accept this baton, mindful of the commitment made to the systematic and structured implementation of Africa's water agenda as articulated in many declarations in recent times.

Chair, allow me to say that in the past two years we have seen an accelerated progress towards identifying the key, continent-wide priority issues in these sectors. The previous and current Ministers of Water and Sanitation made a series of important commitments at eThekweni (Durban), in Tunis, and in Sirte. In addition, the 2008 African Union Summit in Sharm El-Sheik focused on Africa's water and sanitation crisis and there was high-level African representation at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul in 2009.

These events and the resulting policy documents affirm the dedication at the highest political level to accelerating progress towards meeting the water and sanitation MDGs and realizing the Africa Water Vision 2025. The political will generated through these processes provides a critical basis for ensuring that the necessary resources are allocated to see these commitments through.

- In February 2008, the eThekweni Declaration raised the profile of the formerly neglected issues of sanitation and hygiene
- In March 2008 the Tunis Ministerial Declaration on "Accelerating Water Security for Africa's Socio-Economic Development" focused on strengthening partnerships for regional and national actions to improve water security throughout the continent
- The July 2008 Ordinary Session of the African Union, the African Heads of State and Government turned their focus to recognizing the central importance of water and sanitation for the continent's social, economic, and environmental development, resulting in the Sharm el Sheik Declaration enunciates the highest level of political commitment.
- In December of 2008, the Ministerial Conference on Water for Agriculture and Energy in Africa held in Sirte, Libya. The Sirte Declaration reaffirmed the commitment of African countries to adopting and implementing sound policies, institutional reforms and financial investments to support water development aimed at improving the agriculture and energy sectors.

Honourable Colleagues, recently in February this year, in preparation for the 5th World Water Forum, an African regional Position Paper was developed to shift from the policies of 'what and what not' to aim for the practicalities and realities of the 'how and 'who' of implementing the Africa Water Vision.

Honourable Chair, Indeed as you stated in the position paper then, *"Africa has now reached the point where there needs to be a greater convergence between the high level commitments and delivery through concrete and unambiguous actions, strengthening and scaling-up of existing mechanisms and initiatives, and refinement of strategies to close the gaps."*

Chair, it is only fair to assume that the next step is to build on the political will demonstrated in these key policy documents, by identifying and prioritizing actions on the ground for realizing these commitments. AMCOW's role as a voice of the continent on water and sanitation issues, received a boost when it was recently designated as a Specialized Technical Committee (STC) of the African Union. This is important in bolstering the institutional capacity to leverage the required technical and financial resources.

However, the responsibility rests with us as Ministers to ensure that AMCOW institutional capacity is fully strengthened to ensure that it is able to coordinate its numerous ongoing initiatives and to support its member States in identifying and implementing the priority activities that will move them towards their water and sanitation goals. Indeed, foremost among the challenges that AMCOW continues to face is a need for increased institutional, financial, and technical capacity to accomplish its mission.

Colleagues, in order to realize the true implementation of the programs that I have already highlighted above, AMCOW will require a strong fully capacitated Secretariat office that will provide necessary technical leadership in programs implementation, monitoring and management. I want to applaud GTZ and Addis Ababa for seconding some of their technical resources to the secretariat office; let me further applaud the Nigerian Government for hosting the Secretariat office in Abuja and providing necessary operational resources to that office.

It is a pleasure to announce to you today that, as commitment by the Government of South Africa to AMCOW activities, we intend to also second resources to the AMCOW Secretariat in the very near future. I am happy to also announce that we are establishing a dedicated technical office to support my presidency of AMCOW has been established. One of the primary aims of this office, working hand in hand with the AMCOW secretariat, will be to take the lead in facilitating regional and international co-operation, through the co-ordination of policies and actions amongst member countries on water issues, and also to review and mobilize additional financing for the water sector in Africa.

Colleagues, as you may know, that donor commitments have increased substantially over the past few years, at the same time it is also clear that AMCOW requires additional financial resources to realize its mandate. I hereby take this opportunity to urge every one of you, to honour your Member state obligations towards contribution to ensure sustainable operations of AMCOW.

Some commitments have been made by a number of Member States, but additional contributions are required to demonstrate ownership of AMCOW as a regional institution. In addition to increased funding, there is a need to clarify the administrative framework for processing and accounting for funds flowing to AMCOW. Currently, funding is administered through the UNEP Trust Fund, which will be ending at the end of this year (2009). A new and accountable structure for administering funds needs to be created and implemented. This will require clarification of the requirements pursuant to AMCOW's designation as a Specialised Technical Committee (STC) of the African Union.

Chair, as was demonstrated during the Partnership Segment partnership remain a critical aspect of the AMCOW strategy. We must continue to nurture their growth through the introduction of a mechanism for regular review aimed at promoting mutual accountability and adherence to commitments made. Furthermore, we as members of AMCOW should seek to develop a peer review mechanism that aims to keep us moving in tandem.

I would also urge that we must continue to work hard to raise the involvement of African stakeholders in the affairs of AMCOW. In this regard it is important that we are seen to vigorously pursue the mainstreaming of gender and in particular the empowerment of women. Looming challenges such as climate change adaptation require that we build on accessible approaches that are best implemented at the local level. We aim to encourage and prioritise practices of proven effectiveness such as rainwater harvesting, among many others.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Second African Water Week had provided a forum for stakeholders across the continent to take stock of the progress made towards meeting the continental water and sanitation agenda, as well as identifying challenges that must be faced to achieve those goals.

This is an opportunity for the leadership, as a collective both regional and sub-regional levels, to draw upon those outcomes of the Second African Water Week and begin a process to identify specific actions for implementation of the continental water and sanitation agenda at the national and sub-regional levels.

Colleagues, In order to achieve all this; a strong institutional capacity is therefore required. We need to work to further strengthen our collaboration with our regional economic communities and advocate for

their support as required. It is through them that we can best ensure the necessary support to individual countries. Finally we must ensure that the resource side of the equation is given adequate attention. To this end we will advocate for the establishment and strengthening of our river basin organisations as well as the entrenchment of the culture of cooperation around and shared water courses.

Lastly Chair, allow me to take this opportunity to thank AMCOW's key partners who are represented here today; for the continued support that AMCOW is receiving, both technical and financial, in its effort to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of African lives. Our message for this gathering is that we are ready to play our role and be an integral part of shaping and building a cohesive African agenda. We look forward to doing so by working closely with all our colleagues and partners on the continent.

I thank you