

**Kwazulu-Natal Water Indaba**  
**Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs**  
**Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre, Durban**  
**2 November 2009**

Programme Director  
Honourable Premier  
Honourable Chairperson of KwaNALOGA, Mr Obed Mlaba  
Honourable Members of the Executive Committee  
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature  
Honourable Mayors and Councillors  
Members of the House of Traditional Leaders  
Leaders of Water Boards  
Leaders of NGOs and CSOs  
Director-General and all other government officials  
Honoured guests  
Ladies and gentlemen.

I thank you all very much for taking time to attend and engage on this important matter, our water resource. The purpose of Izindaba that we are conducting country wide is to have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing water management in our country. It is through an in-depth understanding of such challenges that we will be able to properly plan and manage our resources for generations to come. Our inspiration for the provincial Water Indabas is drawn from the assertion made in the autobiography titled, *Let My People Go* by one of the icons of our struggle for freedom and the first African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Chief Albert Luthuli who asserts in the epilogue of his book, "The task is not finished". Indeed, the task is not finished when 4 millions of our people still find themselves without access to clean potable water.

Water is also fast becoming a constraint to development in South Africa. Undoubtedly, no development is possible without water. We welcome the positive indicators that give us hope that the global economic recession is slowly beginning to ease off. Given the dire need for development and economic growth in our country, it is our responsibility that we make water available to support economic growth and development. In addition to the fact that South Africa is one of the 30 driest countries in the world, recent economic growth coupled with rural to urban migration has led to an increased demand for water and put more pressure on infrastructure in the entire country.

Climate change has also now become a reality. From the work that the Department has been doing, we know for a fact that climate change will impact invariably on the availability of water and in essence, this

means extreme droughts and floods. It is for this reason that as government, we would like to place emphasis on both mitigation and adaptation when it comes to ensuring that our people are protected from the harsh conditions that come with climate change.

We therefore need to ensure that our water resources are managed in a sustainable manner to enable the provision of reliable and cost effective water services to all our water users. With local government demonstrations against poor service delivery across the country vivid in our minds, we need to identify the challenges that prevent us from providing a good quality service to our people and come up with robust plans to deal with the challenges facing us. The spirit of co-operative governance is paramount for us to achieve the ideals we have identified. The ageing water infrastructure, the unauthorised connections to the systems, and lack of capacity and skills facing all three spheres of government are some of the challenges that we need to confront with courage.

In 2005, we held a Water Summit in this province where, as sector stake holders, we made commitments and came up with ways of aligning our strategies in order to meet the water challenges. After four years, I am again addressing the very same stakeholders and partners in this Provincial Water Indaba, to check on progress made, to re-look at the issues raised during the 2005 Summit and to seek new ways of addressing them.

As a custodian of water resources and a leader of the sector, our Department has a mandate to ensure that our water resources benefit everyone in the country. We have a very progressive legislative and policy framework that guide the management and use of water for the benefit of all South Africans. These policies further place emphasis on ensuring that municipalities not only execute their mandate in respect of water services provision but are also given a chance to have a say in the management of our water resources. I also want to add that we cannot sit at head office and decide which projects are necessary for your province. We must be guided by you at that level as to what the needs are.

Water is a strategic resource that not only gives life, but is also a catalyst for development. Consequently, water has to be at the centre of all development plans. Water availability and management must feature very strongly in the development strategies of all sectors. We need to be mindful of the fact that all the other Millennium Development Goals like health, housing and poverty rely on the availability of water. We will not be able to provide clean, reliable water and good sanitation facilities to our people if we do not ensure that the resource itself is protected, allocated and managed efficiently. We must also ensure that the past inequities in the allocation of water resources and access to services are redressed as speedily as possible.

Government has prioritised five areas that we need to urgently address. The indaba gives us an opportunity to locate water as a central driver within these priority areas. Let me expand, water is critical in education. Women and especially children are faced with the burden of collecting water. This means that

without clean water, children can be deprived of the opportunity to obtain education. Education is also central in ensuring that our people understand the importance of water and why the scarce resource should be used sparingly.

Water is also crucial in the provision and promotion of primary health. Clean and safe drinking water contributes towards the improvement of the quality of life of our people. Water is important in creating decent work and sustainable livelihoods, rural development, food security and land reform. The fight against crime and corruption includes preventing the illegal use of water, and our Department remains committed to taking action against unlawful water use. We need to discourage unlawful acts for the benefit of all that depend on our scarce water resources. We are working closely with the South African Police Service and the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions to address water crimes that threaten the security of supply to lawful water users. These initiatives would also be showcased during the Enforcement and Compliance Week which occurs within the month of November 2009.

Water Resource Management is a national competency as water respects no boundaries and must be allocated in the interest of the nation as a whole. However, we are committed to enabling full stakeholder participation in local water management issues and this will essentially be done through the mandate of Water User Associations that have been established in the province. I remain confident that that through the processes of establishing a Catchment Management Agency and further Water User Associations in KwaZulu-Natal, our mandate will be executed to the fullest, in letter and spirit.

Our Department is committed to attending to the allocation of water as well as needs and development of small farmers who were denied opportunities in the past. We are collaborating with the Provincial Government to do this and to ensure that water is well managed and that the hardships of drought and the variability of water availability are scientifically assessed and managed. Together we must ensure that the provision of services that depend on these resources is based on sound investigations. We can ill afford any negative impacts on our consumers with systems that regularly fail due to poor planning and resources that are not able to yield sufficient water when we have below average rainfall.

The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) underlines the priorities of ensuring service delivery, integrating investments in infrastructure, promoting sustainable economic development and job creation, and protecting the vulnerable including those with HIV and AIDS. There is no doubt that the availability of water will play a critical role in achieving these priorities. We are convinced that the recently approved policy for financial assistance to resource poor farmers which also includes a subsidy for Rain Water Tanks for family food production will contribute to the objectives of the PGDS in a very tangible way. These initiatives are in line with the Water for Growth and Development Framework which seeks to guide the use of water to promote economic growth in the country in line with the National Water Resources Strategy. A more detailed presentation on this will be given to you later on in the programme.

A recently completed Water Reconciliation Strategy study has shown that supply from the Umgeni River is already stressed by the rapid economic growth in the eThekweni-Msunduzi economic hub of the province and adjacent development areas on the immediate North and South Coast. Supply is at risk until the completion of the Spring Grove Dam to be constructed on the Mooi River and soon to augment the system at completion in 2012. Therefore, should a drought be experienced in the Umgeni River Catchment over the next two years, shortages may occur. This will be managed through a process of progressive water supply restrictions to minimise economic impact and consumer discomfort. Since unacceptably high levels of water losses and unaccounted for water are prevalent in the eThekweni Metropolitan area, Water Conservation and Demand Management (WCDM) as well as re-use of treated effluent must be implemented by the metro and other municipalities as a matter of urgency to alleviate the situation. The augmentation from the UMkomazi River, compared to the possible desalination of sea water, will determine the next development option to keep pace with economic development and the concomitant increasing water demand in the area well into the future.

I am sure that we are all aware that large portions of this province have experienced below-average rainfall over the past four to five years leading to water shortages in many areas. However, this situation has improved in a number of areas. What invariably happens after extended periods of below average rainfall is that we experience high rainfall over short periods which then lead to flooding with consequent damage to property and sometimes, the loss of lives. We have to be prepared to manage these flood situations. Unfortunately the high intensity rainfall does not benefit the dwindling ground water resources and a number of years of above average rainfall are required to recharge these sources which form the basis of supply to many of our rural communities.

In some cases, the dam levels are below average for this time of the annual rainfall cycle. This situation calls for co-operation between our Department, water users, and municipalities but most importantly the province. The Department will continue to offer information on the water situation, provide technical support to users through established disaster management systems, and provide financial assistance through the routine national government disaster management funding to alleviate the effects of drought.

Having set the scene for the Indaba, I would like to raise pertinent issues with regard to the pressure on the limited water resources in the province. The availability of water in the province is skewed as some parts of the province have adequate capacity to cater for all the needs of water users whilst others do not. We need to bring about an equitable allocation of water which is why we have a Water Allocation Reform (WAR) programme within the Department.

A pilot WAR study concluded in the uMhlatuze Catchment has shown that a significant volume of water can be made available within the area for redistribution. This will soon be followed by a process of water use verification and compulsory licensing to verify the figures. Proposals and frameworks will then be

developed to allocate the available water, in the main not only to historically disadvantaged emerging farmers, but also to essential economic development in the City of uMhlathuze Municipality that forms the economic hub of northern KwaZulu-Natal.

I would appreciate it if this Indaba can provide direction on what water allocation reform processes would be required in this province. I have met with Agri-Sa already and will continue to engage all stakeholders in order to realise this goal. These will include improving on our licensing and how we deal with single purpose dams.

As a result of short-sightedness of developers from the previous dispensation, communities were living next to the big Jozini Dam in the uMkhanyakude District and the Woodstock Dam in the uThukela District for decades without directly benefiting from these two single purpose dams. This will now be addressed. Development options to utilise water from these dams to supply domestic water services and to support micro economic development in the adjacent areas will be investigated and dedicated funding will be sourced to facilitate beneficiation of local communities.

Communities throughout the country have expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to service delivery and we are aware of the challenges that confront the province as well. I would like to encourage us as the water sector to proactively deal with these challenges before communities decide to take to the streets. I also appeal to the ratepayers associations in the province to seek solutions with us as government in addressing challenges rather than resorting to counterproductive measures like withholding their payments to municipalities whilst they still enjoy the services. This practice impacts negatively on the ability of the municipalities to render services. Municipalities are not in a position to pay their debtors as a result, which leads to restrictions in some cases with dire consequences for users on the periphery of the reticulation system as well as those on high lying areas. We need to find a way of assisting municipalities to recover their costs in terms of services rendered.

The KwaZulu-Natal PGDS highlights spatial development corridors to promote economic development in the province. It is quite clear that a lot of thinking and energy went into these initiatives, but we will also have to follow that with good planning to ensure sustainability of this initiative by developing the water resources needed to give effect to this initiative. Without efficient utilisation of water resources, all these efforts could come to naught.

I therefore want to emphasize the need for judicious utilisation of water and to enforce Water Conservation and Demand Management (WC/DM) by all water users through all sectors. It has been reported that in some areas the water losses are as high as 35-40%. This is totally unacceptable as water is a limited commodity and wise use of water can extend the benefits derived from a drop of water. We therefore have to encourage and promote the re-use and recycling of water in order to conserve this precious life-giving resource.

The extreme levels of poverty in many areas of KwaZulu-Natal also require that effective policies are implemented as a matter of priority. It is for that reason that our Department has piloted WC/DM in a number of districts in the province. The emphasis is on the four pillars of the WCDM where social, technical, financial and legal/institutional interventions are applied.

Because of the water security concerns in the Umgeni River system supplying the eThekweni-Msunduzi area that I have referred to earlier, our Department is contributing financially to a water conservation initiative of the metro to address water losses from ageing pipe installations and to reduce unaccounted for water through demand management processes. With the aid of our donor funded programme, we are also supporting the Msunduzi, Newcastle and City of uMhlatuze Municipalities as well as the iLembe District Municipality with WC/DM programmes.

We have initiated a Blue and Green Drop certification programme for drinking water and sewage/effluent to ascertain the safety of potable water as well as the environmentally friendly discharges from Waste Water Treatment Works. I would like to congratulate the municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal for their efforts in being exemplary with respect to the accreditation process. Most, if not all of the municipalities, satisfy the quality standard set by the South African National Standards (SANS) but they do not satisfy the other criteria related to the management of the water quality. It therefore does not necessarily mean that the non-accredited municipalities supply poor quality water. All water services providers must satisfy a minimum of nine criteria to obtain the certificate. The Department is aware of the fact that some of the Water Services Authorities (WSAs) in the Province are faced with serious challenges with regards to service delivery to their consumers. It is absolutely critical that our resources and support programmes are integrated to ensure that these Municipalities are able to perform their functions as WSAs. Any existing capacity gaps will have to be dealt with; but Municipalities must ensure that sufficiently skilled people are employed to deliver a quality water services to their consumers.

We are also aware that some municipalities in the Province are experiencing problems with the management of Waste Water Treatment Works and Water Purification Plants. I must emphasize that it is the responsibility of each Water Services Authority to ensure proper planning, budgeting and management of such infrastructure to prevent service delivery breakdowns and pollution incidents. Sufficient provision must be made for operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure to prevent service delivery failures. Non-compliance will not be tolerated and will be dealt with under our Compliance Enforcement programme. We will continue to give our full support to the various skills development and capacity building initiatives in the Province. To this end, we are supporting the Sisonke District Municipality financially to upgrade the Kokstad Water Purification Plant and Waste Water Treatment Works to accommodate the increased demand associated with development of the Maximum Security Prison in the town and also the Msunduzi Municipality and uMgungundlovu District Municipality with upgrade of sewerage systems discharging to the Msunduzi and Umgeni Rivers.

The planning and the provision of infrastructure is only the start of providing water and sanitation. Our plans and high quality infrastructure will be of no benefit if good management of operations is not practiced to ensure reliable, effective and efficient service, to avoid dry taps, blocked toilets and polluted rivers. Water quality monitoring and response systems must be developed and put in place. The reliability and quality of service provision must also be monitored effectively. We must have early warning mechanisms established to ensure that we are able to react to potential problems and prevent system failures.

We will be hosting the biggest sports event in the world, the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010 and our country will be in the spotlight. Attempts are being made by some of the municipalities to get a Blue Drop certification but more effort is needed to expedite the process. We need to showcase our country and the quality of water services that we provide to our people. I would like to see all municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal striving for a Blue Drop and Green Drop certificate come 2010. It is my fervent hope that our Water Indaba will come up with concrete plans for the benefit of providing a world class service to enable us to eradicate poverty. The role of the Water Boards be overemphasised in this regard

Lastly, it is my hope that after deliberations today, we will develop a concrete Water Indaba Action Plan as well as a monitoring framework for supervision by the provincial government. The expected outcome should be a focused programme driven and endorsed by the province. Monthly progress reports would have to be presented to the Premier and MECs for Human Settlement, Local Government and Traditional Affairs through provincial structures such as the Premiers Coordinating Forum and the water sector forum. Alternatively, Honourable Premier you may want to consider resuscitating the Provincial Water Liaison Committee to be headed by the Honourable MEC for Local Government and Traditional Affairs, formally constituted in terms of Section 21 of the Inter-Governmental Relations Act. I am considering meeting with the MEC at least three times a year to discuss water related matters as I am from time to time requested to account for service delivery by Parliament and Cabinet.

Let us continue to work together, Together We can Do More!

I THANK YOU