

Welcome Address
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water and Environmental
At the 2nd Africa Water Week, Gallagher Estate
9 November 2009

Your Excellency; AU Commissioner,
Your Excellency, Chairperson of AMCOW
Fellow Honourable Ministers
Special guests from the Northern Hemisphere
Distinguished Guests from the Water Sector,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Bienvenu en Afrique du Sud

It is indeed my singular honour to extend a hearty welcome to you all to the Republic of South Africa, in general and to the 2nd Africa Water Week, in particular. I pray that you had a pleasant flight and that you are well accommodated in your respective hotels to take full benefit of the warmth and generous hospitality of our country and people.

I am inspired to recall the profound message conveyed by President Nelson Mandela at his historic inauguration, ten years ago. "We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil".

As Africans, we trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of meeting the Millennium Development Goals, building peace, prosperity and democracy for the betterment of our people in our beloved continent, Africa.

This is the central thrust of the mandate given to President Jacob Zuma by our people. The consolidation of the African Agenda remains central to our foreign policy objectives. South Africa will continue to work towards achieving a vision of Africa which is united, peaceful and prosperous. This vision of African Unity has its roots in centuries of struggle on our continent and those waged by people of African descent elsewhere in the world. We remember great Pan-Africanists like Sylvester Williams, WEB Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and many others. Our own Pixley ka Isaka Seme spoke to this cause when he said in 1909, that "the regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilisation is soon to be added to the world"

Programme Director, when we had the 1st Africa Water Week in Tunis from 26-28 March 2008 with the Theme “*Accelerating the Water Security for socio-economic development of Africa*”, attended by no less than 30 African Ministers and 530 participants, many lessons and challenges faced by Africa were identified. It is therefore logical and imperative that our 2009 African Water Week Theme should be: “*Carrying forward the commitments of Sharm El-Sheikh AU Summit on Water and Sanitation - a sprint to the finish*”

The 2nd Africa Water Week Thematic Session will help all of us play a role in helping accelerate the implementation of all national-sub-regional Integrated Water Resources Management programmes, in an ongoing endeavour to meet the Sharm El Sheik’s targets. Thus we all “*need to sprint to the finish*”.

We need to take ownership of these challenging sectors as our people expect to have access to clean and safe drinking water, well resourced sanitation facilities, modern infrastructure of dams; boreholes; irrigation systems; people-centred government and functional partnerships with civil society, NGOs; marginalized members of our society, namely: disabled, youth and women groups.

It is no surprise that the NEPAD vision aims at ensuring that Africa’s natural resources should be a catalyst for a common African victory for justice, for peace and for human dignity, rather than a curse that blights her unity, peace and prosperity. As we all know better, the African continent is currently engaged in a deep and fundamental renewal process, namely, the African Renaissance. The over- arching objective of this engagement process is to break the vicious cycle of political instability, poverty, and underdevelopment, and to pursue with renewed vigour Africa’s ongoing efforts to defend and advance her interests in the global arena.

In this regard, the principal building blocks of this renaissance gathering are to increase political unity and concerted action through the Africa Ministers Council of Water (AMCOW), and to accelerate socio-economic transformation.

Although, the Integrated Water Resources Management programmes are work-in-progress, there are many areas where we have made considerable and impressive progress. I am confident that these will be discussed during the 2nd Africa Water Week. For us to move forward, we need to examine the common ground that we have covered at the 1st Africa water Week in Tunis; so as to build on the progress that we have made to date. We need to sprint to the finish, as the Theme indicates.

We should also critically examine the areas where additional progress can be made and offer suggestions as to how we can make improvements. One of these areas is capacity building at the regional levels so that we can translate good and visionary ideas into concrete implementable programmes. This is what our partners from the Northern Hemisphere want us to progress to.

I think this multi-stakeholder thematic dialogue will assist in working solutions for us to draw on the available human resource base of the partners that are represented in this meeting.

Regional integration is very important because as we all know, African economies are generally small and have not grown to their full potential. While progress has been made in achieving regional integration in Africa, there are still challenges ahead. As the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon's recent progress report made clear that Africa could make more aggressive progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Chairperson, kindly allow me to share some of my thoughts with regards to some of the Themes:

Theme 1: Financing Water and sanitation Infrastructure

Africa's lack of water infrastructure and institutions is accounting for slow progress in the fight against poverty and is stifling the potential economic growth. The linkages between water security and economic growth cannot be disputed. However, sustainable financing for scaling up infrastructure and service delivery in Africa remains a key challenge. We should therefore heap focus on;

1. Financing Water Infrastructure for Africa's Economic Growth & Development;
2. Scaling up financing of Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) services to meet the MDGs;
3. Financing strategies, instruments and approaches for Water Resources Development and Water Resources Management in Africa.

THEME 2: Managing Africa's Transboundary Waters

South Africa, being a water-scarce country, faces major challenges in increasing water demand and growing effluent discharge arising from increased economic activity, population growth and rising living standards. Economic growth in neighbouring states mirrors demand in

South Africa for water, and is also adding to the already high pressure on shared water resources.

In Africa, water resources are rarely confined to the boundaries of a single country. Africa's 59 international trans-boundary river basins cover about 64 % of the continent's land area and contain 93 % of its total surface water resources. They are also home to some 77 % of the African population. 15 principal lakes and 24 main watersheds also cross the political boundaries of two or more countries in Africa.

The trans-boundary nature of these and many other ecosystems, together with the natural resources they contain, is the source of diverse environmental issues and presents unique management challenges throughout Africa and, in some cases, beyond the continent itself. Most international basins are without any shared agreements on equitable use or environmental protection. Few have effective institutional arrangements for consultation or cooperation. As a result, procedures for avoiding or resolving international disputes over water are largely lacking.

Africa's fresh water resources are mostly shared between neighbouring states and these finite resources are under stress due to population growth and climatic change. Increasing poverty severely limits the ability to address urgent environmental needs, while development is constrained by inadequate planning frameworks and governance. It is now time to take these issues beyond the limits, constraints and boundaries of the past.

As a typical African state, South Africa shares watercourses and water resources with five of its neighbours: Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland. Although several bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements exist to share a secure future, many challenges still remain. Many African cities, including Johannesburg, are not located on or near a water resource. The significance of this, and the lessons it teaches us in terms of inter-basin hydraulic transfer, will be of benefit to delegates as we try to find better solutions to our common problems.

Due to population growth, climate change and the implementation of various water-dependent development initiatives, the demand for water has been increasing and outstripping supply in some of the African countries. As a result, water will increasingly shape international relations and security arrangements across the African continent in the coming decades

Theme 3: Climate Change Adaptation

Africa as a whole is a fairly insignificant contributor to the recognized drivers that are leading to climate change, being responsible for only 3-5% of the global emissions of greenhouse gases while being home to nearly 18% of the world population. Yet, it is the poorest continent, and people in Africa that are likely to be the first to suffer first and most from adverse effects of climate change (UNEP/WRC, 2008). African governments must continue to press vigorously, through the UN for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse emissions and to meet and even exceed the internationally agreed target of emissions below 40% of the 1990 baseline by 2020 and 80% by 2050.

The Theme should therefore present the water resources situation in the different regions of Africa and highlight the water resources vulnerabilities observed on environmental changes in general and climate change and variability in particular.

Theme 4: Closing the Sanitation Gap

Africa is facing a backlog in meeting the Sanitation MDGs. At the current rate of progress the sanitation MDG is not likely to be met until 2040. Closing the Sanitation Gap Theme requires African countries to review what progress has been made and what actions have been undertaken following AfricaSan+5 and International Year of Sanitation(IYS). In addition to assessing continental advances, it needs to highlight progress made in key strategic areas such as leadership, financing, sustaining services, behaviour change and urban sanitation - and share lessons from leading African sanitation initiatives.

Programme Director, allow me to conclude by stating up-front that the Government of South Africa regards the hosting of the Africa Water Week as a catalyst that will strengthen the already existing South-South partnerships and North-South collaboration, and by so doing, it ensures more interaction among developed and developing nations. Hosting the second Africa Water Week will also advance the solidarity of African nations in seeking indigenous solutions

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There is much we can pride ourselves in, as we progress towards a truly unified Continent and celebrate NEPAD's vision: We are engaged in the EU-AU Strategic Partnership, Forum for Africa China Partnership (FOCAC), the G8- Africa Water Partnership; New Africa- Asia Strategic Partnership (NAASP). Furthermore, Africa will continue to build relations based on solidarity and cooperation with regional and sub-regional groups in the South such a the Non-Aligned Movement, Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Africa-India Forum, G77

plus China, and the India-Brazil-South (IBSA) in pursuit of the Consolidation of the African Agenda.

I thank you ! Merci beaucoup !