

## **WISA 2010 International Biennial Conference & Exhibition**

**Speech by Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs**

**Durban,  
19 April 2010**

### **Greetings**

Deputy Mayor of Durban: Councillor Logie Naidoo  
Mayors & Councilors  
The Ambassador of the Netherlands and the delegation  
The President of WISA: Mr Kevin Petersen  
Prof Roland Schulze  
Chief Executive of WISA: Mr Junior Potloane  
Conference chairperson: Mr Dave Noziac  
Various members from academia, Scientist, Engineers, Doctors  
National, Provincial and Local Officials  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

### **Introduction**

It is indeed a great honor to be addressing such an auspicious gathering here today. A collective of intellectuals from the water sector has gathered here in Kwazulu-Natal, the Province of splendid beauty and splendid people, Comrade Albert Luthuli and Mahatma Gandhi are happy that we are here today.

Water is high in the global agenda because it is key to social and economic development, hence it is also high in the South African Government agenda. All sectors are dependent on water, Water is the source of Life. Even our Industrial policy is also recognising the importance of water in its economic sense.

Last week we presented our Budget Vote for 2010/11 in Parliament where we outlined key priorities and programmes which we will implement to realize the government priorities. Let me use this opportunity to mention few of our priorities which I think will be of interest to you - Water conservation, local government support, refurbishment of infrastructure, protection of our water

resources, water quality, compliance and enforcement, participation of local communities in water resource management.

### **Sector Challenges**

We do acknowledge the achievements of the water sector and grateful about the support of sector partners nationally and internationally. Even though South Africa has done well in achieving the Millennium Development Goals of halving the backlogs by 2015 and can proudly state that we already achieved this goal by 2005 (for water) and by 2008 (for sanitation), but we still have people without clean and portable water, this means that we need to double our efforts to ensure universal access.

As sector leader, I want to use this opportunity to highlight major challenges facing us and also to stimulate your thinking and commitment on how to address these:

Water security involves diligent planning, management of our water cycle including the effects of climate change and monitoring. There is no doubt that we have to maximize and stretch our scarce water resources to maintain its critical role for social and economic development. We have to apply water use efficiency and water demand management at all levels. We have to focus on the re-use of water, including getting water conservation as a way of life.

We have to enhance river systems management and practice integrated catchment management, we have to form partnerships with communities to adopt a river in order to care for it. We require your active participation as we review the National Water Resource Strategy. We need to achieve the targets set by the UN.

We have to understand and communicate the different values of water, including its role as an economic good, as a strategic element for energy generation and food security, its role in health management, industrial production, and its environmental and social values. This implies that, water should be placed at the centre of planning and economic development.

Of concern is the quality of our water resources and the impact it has on our environment, the quality of life and our economy. Various interventions are undertaken including the Local Government Turnaround Strategy, the Wastewater Treatment Plants Intervention Programme, improved monitoring and auditing, improved regulation such as the Blue Drop and Green Drop certification of all water works.

Acid mine drainage remains a worrying factor. We need appropriate long term solutions to effectively control and manage this including smart technologies, improved governance and sector accountability, ownership and commitment.

Due to ageing infrastructure most of completed projects are not functional or rather say water is not coming out of the taps due to ageing infrastructure and other technical problems. The department has established a dedicated programme for Regional Bulk Water Services Infrastructure and secured start-up funding from National Treasury and implementation is progressing very well. This means that we need to ensure that project or programme business plans include post implementation which is operation and maintenance, funding and institutional arrangements, asset management.

Water comes at a cost and we have to manage our finances effectively to sustain service delivery. The department is working on a comprehensive review of the pricing strategy and the funding model which will address tariffing, cost management and cost recovery issues. With ESKOM's huge tariff increase, the water sector must manage costs and cost recovery more efficiently to continue with the delivery of affordable and sustainable water services.

Lack of scarce skills for water delivery is a known "Church Hymn" the question we need to answer is, have we done enough to address this challenge? Have we consulted with Youth organizations and National Youth Agency to interrogate their database of unemployed graduates to check how we can empower the young people to fill in the gaps? Ladies and gentlemen let's be focused and adopt business unusual approach to address this challenge.

Ladies and gentlemen allow me to summarise the above challenges by saying " we will not rest until all citizens of this country have access to clean portable water, water is conserved, water quality standards are adhered to, water leaks are curbed, our rivers are clean, illegal water use has stopped, our communities participate actively in the management of our water resources, until we bring in the cadre of youth and mentor them ".

We need your support ever more than before to realize the global and national agenda. An extended water management approach needs to be adopted which does not only focus on infrastructure and technical challenges, but also responds to sustainable management, financial viability, customer care and business management.

The commitment, determination and approach adopted by the organizing committee in preparation for the World Cup is highly commendable and we are proud about the country's state of readiness to host this event. I trust that all of you are sharing my enthusiasm and are proud to be South African, "viva Bafana-Bafana!!" Our sector requires a similar approach, commitment and rejuvenated teams in order to achieve our goals and put water on the forefront of people's lifestyle and business.

### **Expectations from the conference and way forward**

The conference theme "A time for reflection" enables us to unite in common purpose of the common good water is life. This enables us to do introspection and gear up to fulfill our promise

as stipulated in the “ Peoples Contract”. We need to reflect on how we can speed up water delivery for consumption, poverty alleviation and economic development. A realistic reflection will be achieved only if you are honest about the challenges faced by the sector, not wasting time pointing fingers, defensive. What is important for us is to agree about the sector challenges and they should be used as a dashboard for future planning and turnaround strategy.

This conference has to go beyond presentations and inter-personal communication. I am tempted to add to the conference theme by saying “Out of reflection must come action! “

### Conclusion

The various topics carefully selected for this conference gives us hope that you will come up with a realistic plan of action which should be presented to the Department as a sector leader, and the progress report which should be presented in the next WISA conference.

I am appealing to all of you to be water activists or ambassadors in your areas and convince the world that water should be accorded its rightful place as it is a catalyst to alleviate poverty, a central ingredient in stimulating economic growth and overcoming social inequalities. ,  
Together we can do more to manage and protect our water resources efficiently and effectively for our present development needs and for future generations. .

I wish you all the best for this conference.

I thank you