



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NB: MINISTRY LETTERHEAD

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FRESH WATER GOVERNANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CHAMPAGNE SPORTS RESORT, CENTRAL DRAKENSBERG, KWAZULU NATAL 5 NOVEMBER 2012

Programme Director

Chair of the Water Research Commission, Ms. Barbra Schreiner

Chair of the Conference, Ms. Eiman Karar

Our honoured guest, the eminent Prof Ali A. Mazrui, a true son of the African soil, thank you for honouring us with your presence

Representatives from different governments and institutions from far and wide

Our respected scientists within the water and related sectors

Honourable Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to join you today at this International Conference on Fresh Water Governance for Sustainable Development. I do, in the same breath, appreciate that you have travelled long distances to join us here and participate in this important event where we will discuss this precious yet scarce resource that all life depends upon for survival.

Water is one of the resources that know no boundaries, be they political or physical. This one aspect dictates that as we jointly enjoy the benefits of this resource through what we commonly call "shared water courses", we also need to consider the implications of the requisite International Cooperative Governance. Countries sharing the same water resources need to engage one another and work together for the benefit of such countries.

We can confidently refer as I expect we all know, to some of the success stories around some of the work on trans-boundary or shared water courses. One example is that of the Orange-Senqu Commission which manages the partnership between South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho, the four states that share the Orange River. The project's objective is to manage the Orange-Senqu River in a well-coordinated manner, identifying the principal threats to water resources of the Orange-Senqu River Transboundary Basin and to develop and

implement a sustainable programme of policy, legal and institutional reforms, as well as investments to address these threats.

Another example is the Limpopo Watercourse Commission that manages the Limpopo River which flows between South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, facilitating the building of capacity within the four countries and providing recommendations for the collective uses of the Limpopo River and its tributaries for purpose and measures of protection, preservation and management.

The roles played by our institutions regarding the correct utilisation of our water resources does not in any way take away the responsibilities of our individual governments around the same issue. As governments, our communities look up to us for the provision of this important commodity. We are responsible for delivery of this commodity as a human right and as a social good.

In our country this right is enshrined in our Constitution; this is a way in which we demonstrate the importance of access to water for all our communities. We as a country are of the opinion that all have the same Constitutional right; therefore the delivery of water to all sectors of our population is paramount. In order to assist this delivery, Cabinet has also decided that within its infrastructure budget and considerations, water must be highlighted; thus we now have a specific Strategic Infrastructure Project in this stead (SIP 18). Through this project, water will take its rightful place within the strategic service delivery framework of government, opening up the opportunities for access to the necessary funding we require.

In our country the water sector has been in a state of major change since 1994, with substantial new policy and legislation which defines the framework for water management in the country. While the policy and legislation, primarily through the National Water Act, have been globally recognised for their progressive response to water management, implementation has been slow, for a number of reasons. One of the key areas where the aims of the policy and the National Water Resource Strategy-phase 1(NWRS-1) have not been effectively achieved is in relation to equity and redress in access to water.

Good governance requires transformative leadership and stakeholder engagement at all levels to address challenges faced in managing our water resources which include among others increasing pressure in terms of abstraction (legal and sometimes illegal), habitat destruction and pollution. Climate change adds another dimension of stress to the pressure on our water resources. The effective management of our scarce water resources in this complex physical, social and economic matrix requires appropriate strategies, skills and capabilities

The NWRS-2 sets out the strategic direction for water resources management in the country over the next 20 years, with a particular focus on priorities and objectives for the period 2013 – 2017. It provides the framework for the protection, use, development, conservation, management and control of water resources for South Africa, as well as the framework within which water must be managed at catchment level, in defined water management areas.

In order for us to be able to deliver this necessary commodity, we have different roles even

within government; the major water infrastructure resides within the mandate of national government, whilst the distribution through reticulation lies within the responsibilities of the local tier of government. This is a way of devolving responsibilities as well as ensuring subsidiarity.

In all that we do we need to continue to be mindful of where we come from and therefore continue to ask ourselves whether we are reaching the constituencies that for a long while have been disempowered, the young people and particularly the women who have to walk long distances to have to access this precious and we have to accept, God-given means to life. It is intriguing to discover that as governments, our efforts receive most support from and are mainly appreciated by these very disadvantaged levels of our society.

In South Africa we do have programmes like Baswa Le Meetse and Women in Water through which we do not just hope to reach these constituencies, but we also wish to understand what they think of our efforts to reach them, whilst learning how to interact with them and learning their survival skills. For some of our visitors from outside the country, I hope we will see you again on our shores next year, 2013, when we host the Global Women and Water Summit.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am really honoured to be Minister in this sector. Water is central to all that we are about. Water is an essential to all development, industry, agriculture, health, education, sport, construction, and etcetera. This implies that it cannot be taken for granted; it must be used conservatively and with consideration. It is our joint responsibility to raise the profile thereof within our individual circles.

We have to appreciate the efforts of the continent with regards to issues of water. That we have the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) should send a very strong message to all of us as role-players that water and particularly access thereto by all of about a billion plus people on the continent is critical. We must also be aware that the issue is taken so seriously that it is part of the agenda of the African Union, with the Heads of States and Government being continuously apprised of the progress achieved. All governments need the full and unconditional support of all society, the officials, learning and scientific institutions, industry, and etcetera. We are in this together; we are all affected and interested parties. This is exactly why we have bodies like the Strategic Water Partners Network through which we can harness expertise from the different strains and strands of our lives for the sole purpose of enhancing the work that we do with ideas from those different yet inter-dependent disciplines.

Let me go back briefly to the matters of co-operation amongst nations. By establishing these cooperative/governance structures like the Limpopo and Orange-Senqu Commissions, it is a response to the objectives of the SADC Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses signed on 7 August 2000. This protocol seeks to foster closer cooperation for judicious, sustainable and coordinated management, protection and utilisation of shared watercourses in the region, as well as advance the SADC agenda of regional integration and poverty alleviation.

The effective utilisation of the water resources as well as efficient and harmonious management of our transboundary waters will lead to greater food security, creation of diversified transportation means and other benefits. However, if more fresh water is consumed through unbridled human activities than it is restored by nature, the result is that the quantity of fresh

water available in lakes, rivers, dams and underground waters will be reduced. This can cause serious damage to the surrounding environment. The management of water resources goes beyond water quantity; water quality is also critical. In those parts of the world where there is sufficient water, one sometimes finds the challenge that begs the question: "is the available water fit for human consumption, can it provide habitation for species that live in the water, or can it be used for irrigation without killing the plants?". The biggest challenge is where the little available water is polluted.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we meet here over the next few days, we have to be cognisant of the fact that this conference is not held in isolation. It has to have as one of its objectives and I hope outcomes as well the possibility of taking forward through engagement, some of the commitments, agreements, declarations and plans of action emanating from previous like-minded conferences and summits. I urge all of us to think back and bring into our considerations a lot of the positive pointers from such summits and conferences for example like the World Summit on Sustainable Development which was held in Johannesburg, here in South Africa in 2002, which had what we call the Johannesburg Plan of Action as an outcome. We also held the United Nations Summit on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 and subsequent ones. We have to ensure that at the end of our meeting, the objectives and targets set will be measurable. There must also be a plan that will guide us to achieve or meet these same targets and objectives.

I believe we all know and accept our dependence on our eco-systems services, whether shared or individual, for our livelihoods. We must therefore actively protect these ecosystems particularly in relation to pollution. We cannot ignore their importance even in terms of the improvement of our water quality. In this regard, we need your collective wisdom to recommend ways to deploy the necessary human and financial capital for the necessary development.

The purpose of this meeting and the examples I have sighted of shared water courses and the respective bodies managing them should assist us to come to conclusions and recommendations that will positively impact on effective planning and sharing of experiences amongst nations. As people sharing one of the scarcest commodities, this effective planning must lead to proper and optimal use thereof.

We cannot afford to add to the point as raised by others that the next wars or even world war will be around water. This is a matter that our revered special guest, Prof Mazrui is quite well-versed in. I hope dear Prof, that you will oblige us with some reflection on this matter if you would. We owe it to the next generations to ensure that all our work will mean that we shall be remembered in history as those that worked towards the sustainable utilisation of this resource within our development and definitely not to our or their detriment.

Lastly, I take this opportunity to welcome you all to South Africa for this important conference. I believe that at the end of this gathering we shall have met the objectives through information sharing from various experts and specialist presentations that will be done. We must come out of here armed with the best knowledge, having learnt from one another, around the best ways to manage and govern our fresh water.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge all the role-players who worked tirelessly with the

chair and organisers of this conference to make sure that this event does happen. It is a critical matter for discussion, and the time could not have been better.

I wish you a most successful conference and a worthy time to be experienced.

I thank you.