

**DRAFT SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ON
THE OCCASION OF THE STAMP LAUNCH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SOUTH
AFRICAN POST OFFICE**

CAPE TOWN, CTICC, 20 MARCH 2013

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE POST OFFICE

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

SENIOR MANAGERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER AFFAIRS

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I would like to make the bold assertion that this partnership I see unfolding here this morning gives credence to the reality that water is everyone's business. Who would have thought that Water Affairs and the Post Office could pull off such an amazing collaboration in sending a crucial message to South Africa about its state of water resources?

We have heard a countless times about the so called "message in a bottle" but very little if at all about a message on a stamp. Today, we are traversing a new territory of human interaction and engagement. Through this little act but huge philatelic gesture, we are sending a message to all South Africans especially in the corporate sector that everyone can make a difference in the business of conserving water and using the resources at their disposal to raise awareness about its importance.

The ordinary business of the Post Office is to connect people within and beyond the borders of our country. It takes a unique state of mind to see the role of the Post Office as a carrier of the water message in the manner it has done through these unique stamps.

Personally, I know of no country that has ever engaged in such a unique and innovative partnership particularly focusing on such a crucial resource as water. Going forward, we would like to encourage the endurance of this kind of collaboration beyond the National Water Week Campaign. Through this, we have an opportunity to speak to ordinary South Africans in their thousands if not millions in villages, townships and urban settlements broadly.

In this regard we also want to encourage the initiative to have a Post Office in every village and every township in South Africa so that the message reaches as wide an audience as possible. We appreciate the efforts you have made in recent times, to make the Post Office an instrument of information dissemination and sharing.

We understand the pressures you are facing especially with the sophistication of the information highway. The proliferation of communication platforms in the form of social networks and the internet in general may create the wrong impression that postal services have reached their sell by date.

I am reliably informed that a large number of people in South Africa still use the Post Office as their primary communication medium. We thus cannot ignore such an important platform and therefore wish to join you in your commitment to Deliver, Whatever it Takes!

This time, we must make the pledge to spread the water message, whatever it takes! I need not repeat the fact that you occupy a strategic position as a carrier of mass messages to our citizens. From today onwards, let us support each other's initiatives to keep South Africa talking.

I am also informed that as part of this initiative, you intend to run an exciting writing competition for the youth of our country. The fact that our young people are mobilized to share their experiences with the world about the water situation in our country is a sure sign that South Africa is serious about building a sustainable future.

We want to collaborate with you even on this initiative and seek ways to integrate it with our own South African Youth Water Prize in terms of which the youth from

across the length and breadth of the country, is challenged to initiate a water management project that may be used in future to solve some of our water challenges.

Our youth has done well in recent years with their counterparts around the world and we are confident that the writers' competition will add another spark in our quest to seek innovative solutions to our water management issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen let me turn to the United Nations Declaration which has attracted your interest to launch this unique stamp series. To declare this year, a year of International Water Cooperation, the UN has made a clarion call to the nations of the world and its member states to share best practice in water management but also to remind the world that the globe itself is getting thirstier by the day.

The water resources globally are being depleted in a manner unprecedented in human history. The rate at which humanity is depleting not only water resources but environmental resources as a whole is alarming. This is compounded by the reality of the effects of climate change especially in the developing world which relies mainly on agriculture for livelihoods.

This declaration therefore, says to us as humans, we have a choice either to sit and do nothing in which case we will pay the price for future generations or act now to combat the scourge of environmental degradation. Happily, South Africa is a signatory to many of the United Nations Conventions and Protocols on environmental management.

In the water sector, we are hard at work to finalize our second national water resource strategy which maps the strategic way forward in the management of water in South Africa. We have a lot to do about the challenges that face us as a nation with regard to our water resources.

Just in a few hours, I will be releasing a report by one of our research institutions, the water research commission on the state of non revenue water in South Africa. The report is scathing in its findings about our own inefficient ways of managing water.

It says that about one third of our clean drinking water is unaccounted for every year. This means that we lose about 36% of our clean drinking water through a number of ways like dripping taps, leaking pipes, illegal abstractions and other ways of inefficient water use.

We cannot continue like this if we are to guarantee the survival of future generations. That South Africa is a water scarce country is not a joke nor just a cliché of water experts. It is a reality that every South African has to internalize and start changing their water use behavior.

There are many other areas that need our undivided attention. We must attend to the problem of aging infrastructure in our water distribution systems at municipal level. We must address the issue of skills so as to strengthen our operation and maintenance programs. We must prioritize and streamline our budgeting processes at local level to take into cognizance all the water services needs.

We can only succeed if we work together but we must first agree on the diagnosis of the problem jointly. The Post Office has now volunteered to avail its resources and platforms to talk to South Africa about these issues. We appreciate the openness and willingness to partner. Let us together educate the country about sustainable ways and means of survival.

I would like to take this opportunity again to thank you for your cooperation and a great initiative. I would like to assure you that you have my full support in all endeavors that are aimed at spreading information to our citizens.

Water is Life: Let us Deliver, Whatever it Takes !

Thank You

