

OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS. B E E MOLEWA AT THE NEW AGE BREAKFAST HELD IN CAPE TOWN ON THE 20TH MAY 2013.

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen and thank you very much for accepting our invitation to come and share ideas about the water situation in South Africa. We are meeting at a difficult time following the sad news of the passing of Vuyo Mbuli, South Africa's legend and icon of broadcasting. Again, on behalf of the entire government and people of South Africa, we would like to extend our most sincere condolences to the family and to the fraternity of journalism in South Africa and abroad.

We meet this morning, a day before tabling our department's budget vote in the National Assembly. In this budget vote, we will address a number of areas of achievement in the past couple of years. We will show that the ANC government has been hard at work to improve the lives of poor people at all levels. This is not to deny that there are areas requiring our focused attention but undoubtedly, there has been a consistent trend of improvement over the past number of years.

Access to clean drinking water is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed in our constitution. We have made great strides since 1994 to ensure the realization of this constitutional right to all our people. As you are aware, the average percentage of people with access to clean drinking water is now at 95.2% which indicates a huge commitment on the part of government to provide services.

Despite this success, we are aware of the communities that are still in dire need especially those in rural areas and we are committed to closing the gap of 4.8% which still remains. In this regard, we welcome initiatives such as the Municipal Water Infrastructure Grant which will be a vehicle to accelerate such provision. Working together with our local government partners, we will ensure that no community lives without adequate access to clean drinking water.

In terms of our plans for the third decade of democratic governance, the next decade should be a decade of **equity and redistribution**. As we review our Policies,

Legislation and NWRS all of which will be finalized this year we will ensure that **equity and redistribution** are realized.

We will only succeed in these endeavours with the contribution and help of everyone in the water business including those who are users and beneficiaries of the resource. It is worrying that South Africans seem not to heed the message that South Africa is a water scarce country. We have just received shocking statistics from a study conducted by the Water Research Commission that we are losing about 36% of our clean drinking water due to illegal water use, leaking pipes, dripping taps and other water use behaviour inefficiencies. I want to use this opportunity to call on all South Africans young and old, men and women, black and white to start using water sparingly.

If we continue with this trend of using water as if it is an infinite resource, we may find ourselves in big trouble. There have been many predictions and pronouncements in the past through various platforms that South Africa will run out of water by 2013, 2025, 2030 and so on. Let me make it clear; we will not run out of water in this country. This is so because our water strategy and plans for the future are geared towards sustainability and security of supply. However this reality is only achievable in conditions of partnerships and joint responsibility towards responsible use of water.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the other issue that we must deal with jointly and with equal zeal and commitment is pollution of our water resources. I am glad that we are beginning to see positive results in tackling the problem of mine water pollution in the Witwatersrand. You must have heard the cynics previously telling us that Johannesburg will drown in a sea of mine water and that government is folding its arms while the future of the people in Gauteng hangs on the balance.

As we speak, we have successfully completed the immediate solution in the western basin and already commissioned in June 2012. The uncontrolled decant of AMD in Western Basin effectively stopped in August 2012 putting a stop to uncontrolled decant that started back in 2002. We are currently busy with a second phase

upgrade of the Rand Uranium plant which will further increase the capacity to treat AMD in that basin.

With regard to the central basin, the contract for the construction of a new water treatment plant was awarded in December 2012 and construction started on 14 January 2013. We are making remarkable progress in this regard and the project is on schedule to start pumping water by November 2013. In the eastern basin, construction of a new water treatment plant is planned to commence by November 2014.

Ladies and Gentlemen: infrastructure remains vital in the achievement of our priorities as government. At Water Affairs, we have conducted a study from which a sector wide water infrastructure plan has been developed. According to this plan, we will need about R671 billion over the next ten years to address all the infrastructure challenges in the entire water value chain. This is the reason that we call on the private sector and other partners out there to join hands and invest in this great initiative which forms the edifice of the South African economy.

The plan identifies a number of gaps with regard to ageing and dilapidated infrastructure, operation and maintenance and the issue of lack of skills generally at our municipalities. Water services, particularly the expansion of piped infrastructure, have a high technical (engineering) content, and professional knowledge is often scarce. There is an enormous challenge with regard to availability of some of the requisite skills in the sector; but we are hard at work to reduce the gap with regards to availability of and misalignment of particularly artisans, engineering and technical staff.

We are addressing these challenges together with local government but more work needs to be done to ensure quality service delivery. We have successfully put together a rapid response team to assist and improve the functioning within municipalities with regard to water services and water provision. These are also intended to support municipal compliance with the Green Drop and Blue Drop system through the implementation of proper corrective actions and by raising the skills and competence of municipal officials and office bearers.

To achieve all this, it is imperative that we strengthen the capacity of the water sector institutions. We have completed 90% of the work on the realignment of these institutions in 2012/2013 financial year, including water boards and catchment management agencies. While the revised institutional framework will be implemented in the 2013/14 financial year, we will concurrently decide on the institutional option for the management of the national water resource infrastructure.

This government will not rest until every South African can enjoy clean drinking water. We are working around the clock to bring back the dignity to our people especially those in rural places far away from the cities. Let us all enjoy this natural resource. Let us all conserve it, respect it and enjoy it.

I thank you.