



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS MRS EDNA MOLEWA ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING
OF A BILATERAL AGREEMENT ON WATER RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT AND WATER SUPPLY WITH CUBA,
SOUTHERN SUN HOTEL, OR TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
09 SEPTEMBER 2013**

Programme Director

Your Excellency Minister Ines Maria Chapman Waugh

His Excellency Ambassador Carlos Fernandez de Cossio

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

The acting Director-General of Water Affairs

*The Deputy Directors-General of National Water Resources Infrastructure and
International Water Co-operation at Water Affairs*

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to Minister Chapman and your officials on this visit to our beautiful country South Africa. It is indeed an honour for me to acknowledge your efforts in ensuring that our relationship in the water sector continues to serve the people of both our countries. Your visit also helps to strengthen the long-standing relationship that exists between our countries.

Honourable Minister, I am proud today to also remember that the South African anti-apartheid movement shared a very close relationship with the Cuban state and civil

society throughout the period of the liberation struggle in South Africa, beginning in the early 1960s. From the earliest days of Cuba's revolutionary process that began in 1959, the Cuban state formed official relations with the anti-apartheid movement that existed within South Africa and in exile, and denounced the apartheid regime at all international gatherings.

Assisting liberation struggles in Africa and throughout the Third World became a cornerstone of a re-orientation of Cuban foreign policy after a process of domestic transformation that began in January of 1959. All Cuban heroes are recognised as heroes not just in our country but throughout the continent and the Diaspora. The battles of the Cuban people, including the blockage, are not lost on us. The resilience of the Cuban people throughout continues to build a great sense of self-belief amongst the people of the African continent.

Cuban contribution towards the elimination of oppression in South Africa has ensured that we begin to develop programmes to uplift the conditions of the majority of our people, and these programmes range from basic human needs such as water to basic human rights to health and education. The achievements of the Cuban state on delivery of these basic needs give us a sense of comfort that our decision to work together with Cuba on these matters is not a flimsy one and without merit.

In the words of our former President Nelson Mandela during his visit to Cuba in 1991, he said: "The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom, and justice unparalleled for its principled and selfless character. We in Africa are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defence of one of us. The defeat of the apartheid army was an inspiration to the struggling people of South Africa!"

Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear from the words of our icon that not only we as South Africans recognise the Cuban role to our liberation but many countries in Africa hold similar views and we are grateful to Cuba for the role they played. I must

indicate, Minister that that appreciation still remains and is unshakeable. The Cubans were there in our darkest moments and will remain in our midst for all time.

We have achieved democracy in South Africa and our ultimate goal is to eradicate poverty and universal access to water for our people; this is a journey we want to travel with all those who have given us courage and hope during our dark moments. Cuba is amongst those countries and it is for this reason that in the water sector, we value the Cuban expertise, which has proven itself over time, to address some of the challenges confronting our water resources management systems.

I am aware Honourable Minister that in your country, there are three modes of access to safe water: family connections to pipelines, public service based on supply by water tankers on trucks, and easy access, i.e. carried from within 300 metres of dwelling places. Significant improvements have also been recorded with respect to all these modes.

I have also noticed that as a result of a large programme for the construction of dams, including micro dams, the water storage capacity of your country increased tremendously. This has allowed for a substantial increase in the safe water coverage for the population.

We have a lot to share and exchange in the water sector, thus the need for the discussions that started way back including the first Agreement between us signed in 2001. We are on the right path as a country to correct the imbalances of the past and this is a huge task that requires dedication from the men and women of this country. However we are always mindful of our friends who are willing to lend a hand in our drive towards this ideal.

Based on the assessment of both our situations in the water sector and what we have done before, we are gathered here today to cement our long standing relations in the water sector and pave the way forward by way of a new agreement which will see us further exchange expertise in the integrated water resources management area. This agreement was developed having in mind that South Africa is fundamentally a semi-arid and water scarce country with a mean annual rainfall of

490mm, which is half the world average, with only 9% of that rainfall being converted to river runoff. Rainfall displays a distinct decreasing trend from east to west and is highly variable within and between years with recurrent droughts. This results in highly variable river levels, dam storage and groundwater storage over time.

Of great importance to understand in our country is that the close interconnectedness between the climate and the hydrological cycle means that water resources will be impacted upon by climate change. This will place increased pressure on water resources and ultimately threaten the comfort, predictability and sustainability of future water availability.

This scenario presents a challenge to us in that much of South Africa's water storage, distribution and monitoring, treatment and waste water collection infrastructure is ageing and needs refurbishment or replacement. We know that effective infrastructure maintenance can result in sustainable water services and more efficient use of water which will offset some of the increased demand for water brought on by socio-economic growth and development.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to recognise that our teams in the South African Department of Water Affairs and the National Institute of Water Resources of Cuba have worked tirelessly to develop and agree on areas of cooperation between our two countries. These areas have been agreed to based on what I have articulated. It is a clear sign that our two countries share a common vision of a future where the majority of our people will have undeniable equal access to clean water.

Honourable Minister, on behalf of the people of South Africa and the Government, we are proud to share and exchange expertise with your country. We believe and hope this relationship will go a long way towards ensuring that we provide good services to our people. Our both being here also assures our officials of the political will behind and support for their efforts.

I thank you.

