

KEY-NOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA, AT THE RAND WATER WOMEN'S DAY EVENT AT EMERALD CASINO, VANDERBIJLPARK

16 August 2013

Programme Director

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to this special occasion to mark the Women's Month celebration for the women of Rand Water. I am pleased that your organization takes women seriously and I'm excited that this translates to the working environment as well, as outlined by Ms Mohamed in her presentation earlier on.

On Women's Month every year, we tend to focus on how to eliminate and prevent all forms of discrimination and abuse against women and girls. In spite of the major role played by women in leadership and in transforming the work place in various sectors of our society, little attention has been

paid to the connection between gender discrimination and economic growth.

From the past two decades of our democracy, and indeed for most part of the past century of women's struggle against inequality, we have learned that indeed gender discrimination fuels women disempowerment and seriously disadvantage our nation.

Therefore, during Women's Month, we celebrate the strides that we have made to advance women's rights and the individual heroes, girls and women, who are making history in societies across the world. This is also a day to cast an objective eye on where we stand as a nation and reflect on the obstacles that remain.

Obviously, in an organization like the Rand Water, we expect women to develop their self-confidence and seize leadership opportunities. We also believe women should play a role in the ongoing pursuit of all the goals of their emancipation and should not just be beneficiaries.

As a country, we have made great strides towards ensuring women's access to decision making positions during the past nineteen years. The South African Parliament, which had a mere 2.7 per cent representation of

women before 1994, now has 42 per cent since the 2009 democratic elections following a consistent improvement after each election. This puts our country in the fourth position worldwide with regards to women's representation, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2012. We have managed to ensure that over the past few years we maintain women representation at Cabinet level at more than 30 per cent. Out of nine premiers, five are women, which means the majority of provinces are governed by women.

As President Jacob Zuma has said, we have not reached the 50/50 parity goal but progress is being made towards that destination. More must still be done to promote equality in the public sector but even more work in the private sector which continues to lag behind.

The Commission for Employment Equity Annual report 2013 indicates that white males occupy 80% of top management positions in the private sector. At senior management level, white males account for 69% of all positions. Thus the achievement of equality at both race and gender levels remains stagnant in the private sector. Therefore, the exclusion of black people in those significant levels of the private sector means the exclusion of women as a majority of those excluded are women.

However, we are assured of making more progress in this regard as government is currently finalising work on the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, which will enforce gender equity compliance within both government and the private sector.

Rand Water, as one of the largest water utilities in the world, provides on average four billion litres of potable water per day to more than 11 million people in an area that stretches over 18 000 km². Since its establishment over 100 years ago, Rand Water operates a network of over 3000 km of pipelines with a worth of billions of Rands.

The question you should ask yourselves as the personnel behind the success of Rand Water is how many women from the 11 million people you serve per day benefit from the water that you supply. We must also ask how much have women benefitted from the investment of billions of Rands over the past century of your existence. Most importantly, we must ask how women can help transform our water sector through Rand Water.

I am told transformation lies at the very core of Rand Water's organisational strategy. In fact, most of the time Rand Water's management tells me transformation is embedded in your policies, processes and procedures where gender equality is prioritised.

I appreciate the fact that the organization has implemented an integrated approach to gender mainstreaming, with a strong focus on women development and empowerment in the workplace

through the Corporate Women's Forum that aims to give support to Rand Water strategies where women are affirmed at every level in the organisation.

I therefore want to congratulate Rand Water for recognising that women deserve to be placed and developed in non-traditional roles. Subsequently, I support you for a range of programmes targeted at affirming women in this way. Your idea of actively channelling women into the technically specific professions which are commonly recognized as scarce and critical areas and which have since time immemorial been considered 'male professions', is indeed a noble one.

In most South African households, women are the primary caregivers and as such, they bear the worst of inadequate access to water. As primary caregivers, women are the heaviest users of water. Women, therefore, need water not only for household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and washing, but for those with children, it is also essential for childcare. Under these circumstances, women are forced to ensure that their households have water, and in doing this, they often compromise their own safety by going long distances for water. It also adds to their responsibilities, robbing them of time that could have been better used – whether to improve themselves or tend to their families. As we all know, women also have specific sanitation needs, yet in many areas there are no adequate toilet facilities, partly due to inadequate supply of water.

A lack of access to water, therefore, leads to a lack of adequate sanitation. With women having their own specific sanitation needs, they are once more the worst-affected.

Statistics published in August 2011 shows that a vast majority of households in South Africa have access to water and we should be proud of this achievement. However, we are not blind, as government, that many still have to walk long distances for water, and at times water supplies are not necessarily clean and safe. It is therefore our responsibility, as leaders and women in the industry, to ensure that we close all these gaps and help improve the lives of other women out there.

As government, we are also aware that women need water not only for household use but for production as well. Therefore, the Department is making strides towards improving access to water for women of our country not only for domestic use, but for production purposes. Currently, only **eight percent** of the volume of water allocated to individual users is in the hands of women. These are allocations requiring registration according to the NWA either as a licence, existing lawful use or under a General Authorisation and excludes allocations for basic livelihood support or for subsistence use.

Through the Department's Water Allocation Reform Strategy (2008), we define specific targets for the allocation of water to women that are to be

achieved progressively by 2024. The targets are 30 percent for next year and 50 percent for 2024.

Lastly, I want to challenge all of you present here today to ensure that you participate in working towards women empowerment and not project yourselves as beneficiaries of women empowerment only. You must be the drivers of this programme in your daily life and in whatever role you can play.

I thank you.