

# Deputy Ministerial Speech: Cuban Engineers Handing Over Ceremony

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27 October 2014

Havana; Cuba

***Bom dia Madame Chapman Waugh ( Good morning Mrs Chapman Waugh);***

***South African Ambassador: Mr Naphtal Manana;***

***Officials of Ministry of National Institute of Water Resources;***

***Officials from the Cuban Ministry of International Relations;***

***All Officials from the Department of Water and Sanitation;***

***South African Embassy officials;***

***And other Dignitaries***

***Eu chamo me Pamela Tshwete ( My name is )***

*Let me first start by extending an apology of the none-attendance on behalf of the Minister of Water and Sanitation, Mrs Nomvula Mokonyane, who has fallen ill and was unable to travel to your beautiful country. She has indicated that in the near future she will be coming to celebrate the milestones of our partnership, friendship and solidarity through our collaboration as the water and sanitation family.*

It gives me great pleasure to address you at this event which holds great significance to the South African Water Sector and the ordinary citizens of South Africa. The friendship between our countries dates back many decades and it would be partnerships like these that will see our bond growing even stronger in years to come.

We were together in the fight against apartheid and many other forms of oppression to the human race. I want to salute you on behalf of all our people back home for your unwavering support as we build our country into a developmental state.

Even though Cuba is a country small in land space, it is a country with a very big heart. We did not forget the many Cuban souls who sacrificed their lives in Angola for the plight of freedom of the Southern African nations. Even though this Noble War is referred to by some historians as the Forgotten War, I can assure you that South Africans did not forget and they understood it as a War for Peace.

We are humbled by the continued greatness of our Cuban friends which is still evident in this agreement we are celebrating today. Please note that as the official representative of the South African people in the water and sanitation sector, I bear the gratitude of a nation as I speak to you today.

Our need for engineers exceeds our ability to produce this scarce skill locally. However we are encouraged by the successful efforts of our own Learning Academy in association with our Universities to increase the number of engineering graduates.

We take cognisance of the need for mentoring of these engineers, since we do appreciate the fact that even though producing engineering graduates is the step in the right direction, the development of the graduates into becoming professional engineers is the all-important final step of this process.

I am very glad that we can have our Cuban brothers and sisters to provide this mentoring to our young engineers. We are convinced that your sterling efforts to operate and maintain your precious water resources and associated infrastructure will be of great value to us as well.

I was told that some of our officials were privileged to visit a water treatment plant in Havana which was commissioned way back in 1876. And it is still fully functional and in progressive state. This plant stands as great testimony that efficient operations and effective maintenance are invaluable. As South Africans we will strive towards this level of asset development and management.

We look forward to the day when we can expose our young engineering graduates to your local asset development and management in action as part of a formalised international

experience sharing initiative. This will lay the foundation for a paradigm shift away from major capital investment in that which is new, and leaning more towards maintaining and sustaining our existing infrastructure.

I am encouraged that past skills sharing initiatives between Cuba and South Africa also proved to be of immense value to your engineers in this regard. I am briefed that so many of them are holding very important positions within the Cuban Water Sector and this serves as evidence that this partnership is of mutual benefit to the two countries.

There are many challenges we are facing back home and we are humbled that an opportunity of your engineers and scientists will enable us to address the backlogs and jointly engage in a problem-solving environment as our people needs to be capacitated from National to local government. Our unique water resources management situation requires constant planning to ensure that we remain ahead of what climate change and other challenges may bring across our way. **The partnership and solidarity celebrated here today, shall serve as a platform for our countries to share experience on water resource management, asset management and integrated water resource management for resilience to climate change.**

Again I am encouraged by the level of expertise we are receiving in this regard. We are told that Mr Vega (one of the engineers to be deployed to South Africa) brings great

experience to our country. He was instrumental in similar efforts in Venezuela on institutional reform of catchment management agencies. We look forward to his impact, as South Africa is also in the process of building catchment management area.

I can assure you that we will do our best in taking good care of these wonderful men and women. They will be guests in our country whilst they will be serving our people side-by-side with our own public servants. We will do our best since they will surely give their very best to us where we see "Water as Life and Sanitation as dignity".

Allow me to express the gratitude of my fellow-citizens to our Cuban friends for your greatness, and kindness in sharing your skills with us. Back home our little children are taught: "Sharing is Caring". In this instance it is proven that Cuba is caring, and this leaves us humbled with deepest appreciation.

Thank you very much. **Muchos Gracias.**