



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS,

HON EDNA MOLEWA, MP AT RAND WATER'S 110 YEAR

CELEBRATION, SHARPEVILLE STADIUM,

WEDNESDAY, 9 APRIL 2014

Executive Mayor of the Sedibeng District Municipality,

Councillor Simon Mofokeng;

Executive Mayor of the Emfuleni Local Municipality,

Councillor Greta Hlongwane;

MMC's and Councillors present;

Chairperson of the Board of Rand Water, Adv Mosotho Petlane;

Members of the Boards of Rand Water and the Rand Water
Foundation;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Programme Director

Dumelang! Khotso! Kametsikatileho ea bonahala! We are here today to celebrate water, to celebrate working together, and to celebrate the remarkable success of Rand Water.

It is always a pleasure for me to come to the Vaal - to Lekwa, but to be in Sharpeville is very, very special. Like many South Africans, I have an emotional umbilical cord with this place. You all will know that on the 21st May 1960, not very far from where we are today, the apartheid police force mowed down 69 unarmed people and injured 180 others who refused to carry the hated *dompas* identity document that was meant only for indigenous Africans.

Today, on that now sacred spot stands the Sharpeville Human Rights Memorial where the 69 men, women and children were shot - most of them in the back. The names of all those murdered on that day are now displayed on the memorial plaque at that place. It was also the township of Sharpeville which our democratic government chose as the venue to launch South Africa's new Constitution, signed by our first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, on 8 May 1996.

21 March is nowadays commemorated every year in South Africa as Human Rights Day. Even more significantly for Sharpeville and our celebrations here today the right of access to clean drinking water for South Africans is enshrined in our Bill of Rights. The people of Sharpeville have indeed made great sacrifices for our freedom and liberty.

So we come together here, as free South Africans. We have crossed many boundaries to be here; not only the legislative boundaries that separated us, but the emotional boundaries that defined our separateness.

We are here to celebrate an organisation that has helped to bring equality to all the people of South Africa. Every day, Rand Water purifies, pumps and distributes world class water to all people within its area of supply. The water that quenches your thirst here in Sharpeville, does the same for communities in Sandton, Mamelodi and Waterkloof, and many other areas around Gauteng, and parts of the Free State, Mpumalanga and North West provinces. It does not discriminate. So this organisation, with its legacy of more than 110 years, is helping to bring the people of South Africa together. Rand Water is a state entity which genuinely cares for the communities, in which it operates, an organisation that is always willing to work with us to take the country and our people forward into a better future.

Ladies and gentlemen, the waters of Rand Water nourishes our bodies; it nourishes the crops in the fields; it works with the machinery in our gigantic industrial plants throughout our provinces; it cools the operations deep in the mines of Gauteng and North West provinces. Their pipelines are like arteries, pumping ceaseless across parts of our beautiful country. The waters of Rand Water run under wide plateaus, through deep gorges, and the waters of Rand Water run through the veins of each and every one of us. It is our life blood. It is our future and it is our hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, inadequate basic services such as water supply and sanitation are a key symptom of our apartheid history and the legacy of a regime which, by overt design, sought the impoverishment of the majority of our people. This is the same government that ensured the under-development of infrastructure and resources for the supply of basic services and left us with the massive backlogs we are battling with today. Consequently, the development of our society, and the legitimate demands of the disadvantaged majority for access to our most crucial natural resource have placed demands on what is in South Africa a very limited, scarce and precious resource.

Programme Director, it is painful to remember how access to water was historically dominated by those with access to land and economic power. It is hard to forget how, in 1994, we inherited a South Africa with an antiquated

water law which was derived from a history of conquest and expansion. Inevitably, water under apartheid was used in the interests of the privileged class and the white minority. That law, primarily embodied in the 1956 Water Act, was in force and its effects were humiliating to the majority of our people. We could not allow such a situation to continue, especially against the ever-present background of our Constitution and in the context of a democracy which was struggled for so hard and for so long. We had to make fundamental policy changes. So we brought about the National Water Policy and new legislation, in particular, the National Water Services Act of 1997 and the National Water Act of 1998. We transformed organisations; we changed mind-sets; we even changed attitudes! We roped in organisations, like Rand Water to help us to be able to meet the requirements necessary to meet the challenges of providing water and sanitation to all who live in this wonderful country of ours. Today Rand Water has proven to be a very capable organisation as evident from its service and support to areas beyond its original footprint.

Water, is one of the most important resource available to assist in the upliftment of disadvantaged and rural communities in South Africa. The importance of the role of water is even more critical given the relatively arid climate of southern Africa as well as the challenges in distributing water to areas in need. Our country needs organisations like Rand Water to continue to be pioneers, to be the trail-blazers of today, by ensuring that we can live as a safe and healthy community with clean and plentiful water for all.

I accept that the loudest cry in South Africa, particularly in these past few months, is still for safe, clean and accessible drinking water and related services. I must hasten to say, though, that access to water at the tap is, in fact, only a small element of access to water services. To make this happen, we need infrastructure, technical and management skills and of course adequate funds is usually the critical element. I know Rand Water is always first to assist, with their programmes and initiatives when we call on them. So, I pay tribute to Rand Water today, who I know have been responsible in so many ways for ensuring that we meet the growing demand for water. Rand Water has many notable successes under its belt, too many to mention now, so I am confident that it will continue to grow and be a dynamic force in our country. Of course, the issue of technical skills and expertise is a challenge, and I was pleased to have been a part of the Rand Water Academy Bursary Project and Graduate Development Launch at the end of February this year. For those of you who may not be aware, Rand Water is helping create capacity and capable professional human resources to alleviate the critical skills gaps that exist in the water sector environment at local government level. I applauded your work with the Academy, and I do so again today.

A very important element of our country's policies is always that of Water Conservation and Demand Management. Water demand is increasing as our population grows and living standards improve for the majority of our people, but we cannot continue to think only in terms of water supply - we

will simply not have the physical and financial resources available to make this possible. We therefore need to control also the water use side of the equation and water conservation is therefore a vital concept that must be ingrained in our communities. We must stop wasting water in our homes. Leaks must be fixed. Sweep your driveways, do not rinse them down. Close taps that you see running, even if the tap does not belong to you! Be vigilant against the improper and unnecessary wastage of water. This is critically important.

In this respect I am gratified with the response of Rand Water in investing financially and with its human resources in its ***Water Wise Programme***– an environmental campaign aimed at increasing the awareness of the need to value water and to use it wisely. South Africa is a water-stressed country, and as I mentioned earlier, population growth is having a real impact, but there are also the issues of pollution, the destruction of our wetlands, alien invasive plants and the effects of global warming. Rand Water's *Water Wise Programme* advocates for changing people's attitudes and thus their behaviour to use water more wisely. It is a visionary approach to water conservation, and I join many others both here in South Africa, and internationally, who have given accolades for your work in this arena.

Water conservation has many benefits. One is that it pushes back the date of crisis when there is no more spare water in South Africa. The other is that it saves the government, and therefore the tax payer, considerable sums of

money. If we can all use less water, we will not have to build more dams quite so soon. This allows the money that would have been spent on the dams, to be spent on other essential services,. Water conservation even saves money for local authorities *by* reducing the volume of water that has to be purified.

Just over two weeks ago, we were with President Zuma in Lesotho to launch the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase 2 and to congratulate all those dedicated people who made the project the success that it will be. The President saluted the engineers who had the vision to define this second phase of the Project. We joined hands with colleagues in Lesotho to pit our skills against the mountains, the snow and the waters of the Roof of Africa. I salute the workers who have ensured, through their sweat that this project will be completed on time – in 2020. This second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Scheme will provide South Africa with water, and in turn will provide Lesotho with infrastructure and hydro-electric power. On completion, the Polihali Dam in Lesotho will deliver additional 15 cubic meters water per second to South Africa. Rand Water, of course will have the ‘lion’s share’ of that water when it gets here, so that it can continue to do the work it does!

Ladies and gentlemen, water can divide people, but as we have seen it can also bring them together. South Africa has a divided and unhappy past. The waters of Rand Water continue to bring us together, to unite us. We continue

to build a new nation. It is a long process, and at times it has been difficult, but it needs people and organisations with vision to create opportunities to bring people together. This celebration is a necessary symbol of the desire of South Africa to make the nation work.

In conclusion may all the people of Sharpeville drink from the waters of Rand Water, may the children in parts of Mpumalanga, Free State and North West also drink these waters. May they grow tall together under this African sky and be proud of Rand Water that had the vision to overcome division, ignorance and suspicion to help us build a new future, together. To Rand Water, you are one of the 'jewels' shining in the crown of South Africa – I congratulate every single one of you on your 110 year anniversary – may you continue to grow from strength to strength.

I thank you!