



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEAKING NOTES FOR DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION, HON. DAVID MAHLOBO MP BRICS WATER MINISTERS MEETING

Date: 18 November 2021

Time: 13:00-15:10

Venue: Virtual

Your Excellency, a very good afternoon Narendra Modi. Please receive our revolutionary greetings and warm greetings on behalf of His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of the Republic of South Africa and on behalf of Minister Senzo Mchunu, the Minister of Water and Sanitation in South Africa, the government and the people of the Republic of South Africa.

We are meeting on a virtual platform which is a new normal. I want to take this opportunity to quote His Excellency, our first President Nelson Mandela when he said:

“In this new century, millions of people in the world’s poorest countries remain enslaved and in chains. They are trapped in the prison of poverty. It is time to set them free.”

As I have said, we are meeting under uncharted waters. This is the second year since the advent of COVID-19 across the globe. As a result of the

pandemic, millions of people across the globe have lost their lives, and many have lost their livelihoods.

On behalf of His Excellency, President Ramaphosa, we wish to convey our sincere condolences to all those families who have lost their loved ones. We also salute all the frontline workers in the health sector and other sectors, including those who are working in the frontline of the water and sanitation sector, who have laid their lives in the service of humanity because water is one of the most important elements we had to use through washing of hands to prevent this pandemic from spreading, alongside keeping our social distance and wearing our masks.

We are very pleased that in terms of development in the world and advances in science and technology, the world was able to develop vaccines at a faster rate and see them being rolled out in various parts of the globe, including in our own BRICS member countries.

We are also very saddened by some countries who continue to monopolize and practice vaccine apartheid where they accumulated more at the expense of the poorest nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused very devastating impact to a number of communities around the globe. Many economies that were already struggling, have stagnated. Many investments that were being made to be available to be invested in meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the main especially the goal around water and

sanitation, which is SDG six, those investments have been redirected to combat and fight this pandemic.

COVID-19 Recovery Plans

As we are sitting here today, many countries and many governments have developed their recovery plan in order to be able to reignite their economies so that we can be able to come back to the path we had before the pandemic, where there was a lot of economic growth, there were issues of distribution of the wealth that we are experiencing.

Equally, we must mention that the COVID-19 pandemic has actually exposed inequality and now poverty is rearing its head. Therefore, it is time to work together and have shared aspirations.

Water situation in South Africa

South Africa is one of the water scarce countries. We are experiencing long droughts as a result of climate variation and climate change. And as one of the countries in the SADC region, we one of the best examples where we share watercourses instead of rivers being a source of conflict. We work in peace through a number of conditions that we have unlike in some parts of the world, where water should promote peace and development. But water has been used as a source of conflict and sometimes as a source of war.

One of the roles that we need to play as BRICS countries is to use water as a means for peace and development so that we can be able to share under as it flows from one country to another.

Legislation

Our own constitution is very clear that water is a human right. As such, here in South Africa, we live by the motto that water is life and sanitation is dignity. Over the last 27 years, South Africa has made significant strides in ensuring that water is accessed by millions of South Africans who were previously disadvantaged because of the color of their skin.

In terms of the provision of water services for example, South Africa has increased delivery from 64% in 1994 to 94% in 2021. However, we admit that more work still needs to be done, His Excellency President Ramaphosa is the first to admit that more is required from all of us.

There are still South Africans who don't have access to water as we speak, and those who don't have decent sanitation. In this case, we want to explore the use of groundwater, which is in abundance especially in areas that have not been affected by drought and human densification.

His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa, has initiated an Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan that has been accepted by both by business and labor, including the representatives of our people in various legislatures.

This Economic Reconstruction Recovery Plan, in the main, entails investment in several industries which include investment in power generation, in transport and infrastructure, in telecommunications and more importantly, the biggest investment is in water resource infrastructure.

We are actually now engaging with various countries and other BRICS members to start to look at investment in infrastructure opportunities. Therefore, His Excellency is inviting your own governments, including

using our own BRICS Bank Development Bank, that water should be one of the element that the Heads of States and governments should ensure that water and sanitation related infrastructure or environmental infrastructure is funded adequately.

Your Excellencies, we are also suggesting for your consideration that we have to be able to realize the peace component of water as well playing a most important role around issues of economy, issues of peace and development.

Innovative technologies in the water sector

Water is increasingly becoming a security risk and if countries do not cooperate, we find ourselves in crisis.

Your Excellencies, I therefore implore this meeting of BRICS Ministers to explore the use of technologies in order to finding solutions in the water sector, especially now in the time of fourth industrial revolution. We must use the advent of technology, share technologies and be innovative so that we can be able to meet the rising demand issues of water and strengthen our water conservation and demand management education.

More so as most sectors are using more water, which is increasing becoming a scarce commodity in many parts of the country.

We also have to be able to know that in certain instances, there will be water that will be available but it will not be fit for use because of issues of pollution. We have to use technology to promote reuse, and treat water to the global standard such that water can be fit for use in our own country.

We have the mining industry that has been here for generations. They have actually contributed to the foundation of our economy, but equally,

they have caused an untold suffering with respect to environmental damage, including the pollution of water resources.

We are engaging with the mining sector, both in our country, including those mining companies that are actually part of the of the stock exchange of other international bodies, and are imploring them to come back and fulfill their own obligation in our own country. We want to reclaim that particular water. We must be able to reuse it, but using appropriate technologies.

Knowledge sharing

The other area of cooperation Your Excellencies is issues of knowledge and sharing of skills. Some of member BRICS countries have the best universities. We have the best experts and practitioners. We must be able to create amongst ourselves, communities of practice, but we must also be in a position to allow young people to actively contribute to finding new ideas, including women that they too must be involved in skills development, such they can be able to look after the water resources.

We also have to cooperate, Your Excellencies, on issues of building capable institution. Our philosophy for water has been adopted and we have learned from the UN around integrated water resource management, the role of communities, indigenous knowledge and the practices by our own communities and creation of catchment management agencies and other water forums.

Water committees is an important aspect that we will share amongst ourselves as members of the BRICS countries.

Effects of Climate Change on water resources.

As we close Your Excellency, one of our biggest challenge of our lifetime is climate change. Climate change is going to continue to have the biggest effect around the issues of availability of water, especially where water is unevenly disputed in the world as discussed during the recent COP26 engagement.

Let's take our own particular position, provide leadership, provide resources while dealing with the challenges of climate change that pose as a serious threat around the issues of the existence of humanity.

As I close Your Excellencies, I want to close with His Excellency former President Nelson Mandela when he said and I quote:

“As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality exist in our world. None of us can truly rest.”

I therefore insist that we should not rest as BRICS members, as long as there are many people across the globe that continue to experience poverty and continue to experience deprivation of resources. Women and children continue to bear the brunt and experience the bad decisions that are being made. We have a duty to protect humanity as we all have set aspiration for peace, development and justice.

I thank you