

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR THE MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION, MR SENZO MCHUNU AT THE 5<sup>TH</sup> WATER RESEARCH COMMISSION SYMPOSIUM, 20 SEPTEMBER 2021**

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**1. SALUTATIONS & INTRODUCTION**

A very good morning to the:

Minister at the Kenya High Commission, Ms Beatrice Karago,  
Deputy Ministers of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Ms Dikeledi Magadzi and David Mahlobo,

Deputy Minister of CoGTA, Ms Nkadimeng,

Chairperson of the Water Research Commission, Dr Nozi Mjoli,

CEO of the Water Research Commission, Mr Dhesigen Naidoo, as well as the Members of the WRC,

Our international partners,

Innovators, members of academia and all those present here today,

It is indeed **an honour to address you this morning** on this platform; thank you to the Water Research Commission for this opportunity. Let me also use this time to **congratulate the Water Research Commission on its 50th anniversary; 50 years of developing robust water and sanitation solutions for our country and the global community**; this is indeed a great milestone that you have achieved! A **special appreciation to the current Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Dhesigen Naidoo**, who has been in the driving seat, **steering the organisation to greater achievement for the past 10 years**. To the staff and leaders at the Water Research Commission, I want to thank you for your work and may you continue to be in service of our people.

## **2. CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVES AND MANTRA**

The **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**, which contains the aspirations of the people of South Africa, is the highest law in the land; all **obligations** imposed by it **must** be fulfilled! As the Government is based on the will of the people, we therefore have a duty to improve the quality of life of ALL citizens! **Section 24 of the Constitution** gives everyone the **right to “an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing**, while **section 27(1) (b)** states that: “Everyone one has the right to sufficient **food and water**” – the provision of **proper sanitation** as well as **access and use to water** are therefore, **basic rights** which need to be realised by the Government working together with all the relevant stakeholders.

Our **mantra**, as the Department of Water and Sanitation goes: ***‘Water is life. Sanitation is dignity’***; this highlights the importance of our mandate as it is **anchored on two very fundamental human rights** – the right to life and the right to human dignity, which are the only non-derogable rights!

## **3. CHALLENGES ON WATER AVAILABILITY AND SOLUTIONS**

It has become **increasingly difficult to remember a time when our country as a whole was not experiencing some form of drought, or water challenges** requiring urgent action. The **Covid-19 pandemic** has **further exposed our vulnerabilities** when it comes to water and sanitation services. **Even in the midst of the pandemic, we are still talking about water restrictions in various areas** of South Africa. **However**, having said the above, **today we view that with a renewed hope, as important strides have been made in the improvement of our water and sanitation management approaches**. The improvement and developments achieved in the past, give us confidence of our ability to future-proof our water resources.

**South Africa cannot change the climate systems that influence weather variability and conditions**. But it **can do a lot to adapt to changing the future** where parts of the country will get drier, warmer and the intervals between droughts will be shorter. There are therefore a **few points that the sector is considering** and will need to continue to focus on, in order to future-proof our water resources:

- (a) The **gap between water supply and water demand continues to increase**. We need to work against a situation where water demand exceeds water supply in any of our water management areas. A **combination of unpredictable rainfall patterns and increasing water demand, due to growth and development is increasing levels of water stress** or the gap between water supply and water demand. **Over the past several years**, we have seen the **Water Research Commission leading the growing momentum designed to address our water quantity and water quality challenges** through innovation and new technologies. A role that needs further Government support now and in the future.
- (b) A **robust water security strategy**. **Elements of a water security strategy already exist** in a number of water sector documents, such as the National Water Security Framework, national policies, regulations, and development plans, but the **transition to a water secure country must be a shared effort, measurable, time bound and designed to inform water-related decisions and plans**. A **reliable supply of water at an acceptable quantity and quality that's not harmful to human health, livelihoods, development and the environment is essential for the future development of South Africa**.
- (c) A **new sanitation paradigm**. **Sustained investments in cutting-edge innovative technologies and solutions will revolutionise sanitation**. Technologies, that can use less water, or no water at all, are the future of our country, the continent, and the global community.

**The National Water and Sanitation Master Plan highlights the top priority issues confronting the water and sanitation sector at this time and seeks to rally all water sector stakeholders in South Africa to work together** in order to ensure that the country gets ahead of the curve in relation to both current and future challenges.

#### **4. EFFORTS OF THE WATER SECTOR**

***“When the well is dry, we know the worth of water”***, these words coined by Benjamin Franklin, alert us to the value of water and how to appreciate it. Without water, nothing else matters. Therefore, the **sector needs to urgently address water governance issues and work together to increase investments in water security**. These need to be recognised as absolutely essential for the development of our economies, our societies and for the planet.

The **Covid-19 pandemic added another dimension to the water challenges** outlined above. The **sector, led by the Department of Water and Sanitation, responded with emergency water and sanitation provision initiatives**. These were **not designed to provide long term solutions; hence more permanent and sustainable solutions are still needed**.

In this regard, **more investment should be committed in developing platforms that support the fast-tracking of technological innovations** to application, therefore benefiting our communities meaningfully. **We need, as a sector to embrace technological innovations and recognise them as the gamechanger we need** to secure our water, now and in the future. **We need as the sector, to be open to new ideas and approaches to deliver water services**. We need to embrace the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution and the new ways of doing things, that it promotes.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

As I conclude, I **wish you all fruitful engagements** during your sessions over the course of the next few days and I **want to emphasis that as the water sector partners, we must continue to work together**, join hands and pool our resources **in order to put water security at the heart of sustainable development, thus securing our water future – for generations to come!**

Thank you!