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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**SPEECH BY L N SISULU ON THE OCCASSION OF AN OFFICIAL
WELCOMING CEREMONY OF THE CUBAN WATERENGINEERS
22 APRIL 2021, DIEP IN DIE BERG HOTEL**

*Your Excellency, Cde Antonio Rodriguez-Rodriquez , President of the
National Institute of Hydraulic Resources*

Your Excellency Ambassador Rodolfo Benítez Verson and your delegation

*Your Excellency, Ambassador Shope-Linley, our Anbassador in Cuba and
your staff at the Embassy*

The Acting Director-General of Water and Sanitation

Heads of the Water Sector Partners

Executive Management of the Department

Our Special Guests, Cuban Engineers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by extending a sincere word of welcome to all for joining us today at this official welcoming ceremony of our partners, the Cuban Engineers. These Cuban Engineers have come to South Africa to partner with us in our efforts to ensure that we improve the delivery of water and related services to the majority of South Africans.

Let me take this opportunity to also congratulate your country, for the successful handover of power and the election of President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez as the President of Cuba at the 8th Congress of the Cuban Central Committee.

Ambassador, I must also apologise upfront that this ceremony is only taking place today, because as we are all aware of the current crisis facing the world, it was practically impossible to meet in this manner.

Let me also take this opportunity and indicate to you Ambassador, that South Africans celebrated Human Rights Day on 21 March which is the day when earlier in our history, scores of people were killed by the then apartheid regime, thus the commemoration of the day in remembrance of the horror of that time.

In this of April back in 1994, the majority of South Africans, mainly black Africans, exercised their democratic right of electing a government of their choice for the very first time. I am mentioning these two milestones in our history as they somehow coincide with March 23rd, where the apartheid South African forces concluded their failed attempt to take Cuito Cuanavale. As you remember this period in your history, we too as South Africans celebrate with you on the victory at The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale where your forces dealt a crushing blow to the invading troops of the South African apartheid regime. We will remain forever indebted to Cuba through that memory.

I am aware that this group of Cuban Engineers arrived in South Africa at the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic which has led to thousands of infections and deaths along with severe socio-economic impacts. The Virus has heavily hit the global economic activity and the world's economies started falling even before nationwide lockdowns were implemented. Due to the virus outbreak

health measures are hindering economic activities and have put governments into a difficult situation.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has slowed down investments in the water sector worldwide, this is more applicable to the South African situation. That fact forms part of the issues raised in the country's National Water and Sanitation Master Plan. The Plan also recognises the importance of attracting private sector investments and expertise in order to ensure delivery of water and sanitation services is expedited.

Service delivery cannot be a reality if operations and maintenance fail. That therefore is one of the inputs that led to the selection of the required technical skills that were requested from our sister country, Cuba; these being ten (10) mechanical engineers, ten (10) electrical engineers, nine (9) project managers, four (4) civil engineers and two (2) scientists.

I must say here and now, Ambassador, that as I stand here on behalf of the Government of the people of South Africa, delivery of services must also include ensuring the increased the importance of operational reliability of infrastructure on the ground. This has been and continues to be an Achilles Heel in the work that we do. I am emboldened that even in the previous interactions, there were some of the municipalities that benefitted from the expertise of the colleagues from Cuba. Based on this, we can see that this relationship has deep and far-reaching impacts on the lives and livelihoods of South Africans.

Furthermore, COVID-19 is shining a harsh spotlight on the inequalities, hardships, and global health risks that result from the collective failure to uphold the human rights to water and sanitation. The world's poorest received the COVID-19 shock on top of existing major urban water and sanitation services deficits, all pointing towards a potentially overwhelming burden to contain the

virus. In many communities around the world, a lack of water supply and sanitation deprives people of their most basic protections against the spread of the virus and other diseases, especially the communicable types.

As the Department of Water and Sanitation, we had to put in place measures to respond to this pandemic which focused on water services infrastructure because we believed that by improving these areas, we would be doing our best to combat the spread of COVID-19 in mainly rural and densified informal settlements.

Your Excellency, I am proud today to also remember that the South African anti-apartheid movement shared a very close relationship with the Cuban state and civil society throughout the period of the liberation struggle in South Africa, beginning in the early 1960s. From the earliest days of Cuba's revolutionary process that began in 1959, the Cuban state formed official relations with the anti-apartheid movement that existed within South Africa and in exile, and denounced the apartheid regime at all international gatherings.

Assisting liberation struggles in Africa and throughout the Third World without benefit to itself became a cornerstone of a re-orientation of Cuban foreign policy after a process of domestic transformation that began in January of 1959. Cuban contribution towards the elimination of oppression in South Africa has ensured that we begin to develop programmes to uplift the conditions of the majority of South Africans, and examples of these programmes include basic human needs such as water, health and education.

In South Africa, the close inter-connectedness between the climate and the hydrological cycle means that water resources are impacted upon by climate change and this places increased pressure on water resources and ultimately threatens the sustainability of future availability. This scenario presents a challenge to us in that

much of South Africa's water storage, distribution and monitoring, treatment and waste water collection infrastructure is ageing and needs refurbishment or replacement. Effective infrastructure maintenance can result in sustainable water services and more efficient use of water which will offset some of the increased demand for water brought on by economic and population growth.

I am humbled today by the presence of the Cuban Engineers in our country and I have trust that the journey we have been travelling together from the days of our liberation struggle will ultimately lead to the betterment of conditions of living for the majority of South Africans, especially with regard to the provision of water services. The struggle for liberation was for all of us to be free in our own land and today we have the responsibility as the two nations, to ensure that basic needs are afforded to all. Water is such a basic right and the country's Constitution affirms that.

As we embark on this water resources management programme between the two countries, let us remember that we are doing a great service to the ideals our great forefathers, Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela, stood for. The courage to dedicate their lives to the total emancipation from colonial rule and oppression is a clear indication that we cannot afford to fail our people.

Your Excellency, in 2011, we had the first group of nine (9) Cuban Engineers relocated to South Africa; then the figure grew to thirteen (13) Cuban Engineers in 2013 and recently we had thirty-five (35) Cuban Engineers who arrived in February 2015 and departed in March 2019. I have been made aware that currently we have twenty-five (25) Cuban Engineers who arrived in August 2020 and have been placed in all the water cluster regions and our nine (9) Provincial offices.

Today marks a joyous moment for all of us, as I know that South African people will continue to have access to quality drinking water and utilise dignified sanitation facilities and services through the assistance of the friends and colleagues from Cuba.

Your Excellency, since the inception of the RSA-Cuba Agreement in 2001, Cuba has been able to impart knowledge on maintenance & operation of water infrastructure and your Engineers have furthermore ensured that they strengthen capacity building to our young and upcoming engineers, technicians and artisans in municipalities and Head office.

I am excited to welcome all twenty-five (25) Engineers to the Department of Water and Sanitation of South Africa for a period of three (3) years believing that they will change the water and sanitation sector to serve all people in SA and that their expertise could well be utilised in the rest of the SADC Region.

Your Excellency, I am informed that this team of Engineers will focus and pay much attention to the following:

- strengthening operation and maintenance of water infrastructure sector;
- providing support to Provinces and Municipalities where delivery of water services is critical;
- capacitating the young candidate Engineers & Artisans;
- strengthening integrated water resource management in relation to its performance on the water value-chain; and
- effectively and efficiently assisting the implementation of National Water and Sanitation Master Plan.

With the experience that I have garnered of working with the Cuban Government from other Departments, I believe that the Engineers will display the same dedication and commitment towards the task at hand.

I know that the staff at the Department is very excited to be working with your Engineers across all areas and hopefully, upon completion of the programme, we would have covered a lot of ground towards a sustainable water resources infrastructure management.

Finally, I officially welcome the Cuban engineers to South Africa and wish them a warm stay as well as good health. Let them feel free to explore our country and enjoy its beauty.

I thank you