SPEECH DELIVERED BY MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS
At the
NATIONAL ARBOR WEEK LAUNCH
ATTERIDGEVILLE, MOROE STREET PARK
31 AUGUST 2000

Ladies and gentlemen, friends

I am delighted to join the community of Atteridgeville to celebrate Arbor week today. This community has recognised the importance of planting trees to improve the quality of our lives and I would like to commend all those involved in the greening and food garden projects.

A few years ago Arbor Day was expanded to National Arbor Week. This was done in order to do justice to the important issues that we need to address during this time. During Arbor Week we draw the nation's attention to the value of trees and the different roles that they play in our lives.

The theme for Arbor Week 2000 is "Trees heal our Land". Under this theme we are highlighting four areas in which we need South Africans to participate.

- **Protect our indigenous forests**
  Only half of one percent of South Africa's land is covered by indigenous forests. These forests are a rare and important resource. They provide homes for animals, trees, plants, insects and birds. They are also very important to rural communities because they provide medicinal plants, building materials and fuel. Indigenous forests are sacred to many rural communities and they provide spiritual and cultural homes for many of our people. Indigenous forests also provide people with places for us to visit in order to get to know our natural resources. In this way they also provide the basis for tourism in many areas. We must do everything we can to ensure that these small and precious forests are protected and

we need the help of all our people in doing that. Visit our natural forests and help us to protect them.

- **Help us to prevent veld and forest fires**

  Forests, particularly plantations, provide jobs and economic opportunities for many of our people in rural areas. The plantations serve important industries including sawmilling, pulp and paper and housing. The economic benefits of these trees are however threatened by fires. Wild fires also affect other kinds of agriculture and land use. For the sake of our forests and all our rural areas I call on all South Africans to help us to prevent veld and forest fires. You can do this by ensuring that fires are not made in the open during the dry season and by informing the authorities should you see a fire which may be out of control.

- **Green our homes**

  Trees in our cities, towns and settlements help to make our homes shady, green and dignified. This is the importance of Urban Greening. The quality of our lives is improved through clean air, noise reduction, storm water control and beautification of our surroundings. Some parts of South Africa, especially formerly white areas are leafy and green. Others, especially townships and informal settlements are often bare. This mirrors life in South Africa, where as a result of apartheid, there have been great disparities of wealth, income and opportunities between black and white. In the same way, trees have been more prevalent in the formally privilege areas than in the townships and even rural settlements. We need to turn this situation around because trees are colour blind and should be enjoyed by all our people. You can help by planting trees at schools, churches, in the street and at home. You can also work with your local government to promote tree planting campaigns.

- **Plant a tree of Remembrance**

Throughout history people have planted trees in memory of their loved ones. Trees can serve as a living memory to people who have made a valuable contribution to our society. I would like to ask you to continue with the enthusiastic support that was given during last year's trees for remembrance campaign. This year's theme refers to trees as a symbol of healing wounds in our nation. Let us all arrange to plant trees of remembrance in our communities. Later this week I will launch a Register of Remembrance which will record the names of all those in whose honour trees have been planted. In addition my Department will make a plaque available which can be placed near the tree to record the name of the person for whom the tree has been planted.

The importance of today's event:

This important event, which is the national launch of Arbor Week is focusing on Urban Greening. The purpose is encourage all communities to participate in greening our towns and cities.

Various organisations within the community, for instance Tirelo Sechaba here in Atteridgeville and NGOs like Trees For Africa, are working together with my Department to promote the idea of greening the townships. We commend them for their hard work and dedication.

We know that people in green surroundings feel much more satisfied, more relaxed and is healthier than in concrete jungles. The crime rate also tends to decrease in such institutions. Urban Greening is an activity to be carried forward not only by Government and NGOs, by also by members of the community.

Announcement of the donation of funds to Trees and Food for Africa, to support food gardens and urban greening.

Over the past few years we have come to see that urban greening is not an easy process. In fact the greening of our towns and cities takes a great deal of

time, money and dedication. The greening process can only really take hold if local governments become actively involved in the process. At the same time, local governments do face constraints and cannot shoulder the burden alone. We need a partnership between all levels of government as well as Non Governmental Organisations.

It is in this light that we have approached the idea of establishing a national urban greening fund. The idea of the fund will be to support local government urban greening initiatives and to kickstart tree planting projects around the country. We have felt that NGOs also need to play a role in this process and it is for this reason that we have decided that the fund should be managed by an NGO with a strong track record in urban greening - Trees for Africa. This main purpose of this project is to raise funds to support Local Government, NGOs and Community Based Organisations to establish urban greening projects in towns and townships. It is envisaged that the fund will focus mainly on previously disadvantaged areas. Communities and Local Councils will be invited to apply for the use of some of this fund for proposed projects. These applications will be screened against a set criteria and funds awarded accordingly.

The fund will be a joint venture between my Department and Trees and Africa and my Department will be providing the seed financing of R1,2 million.

But, ladies and gentlemen, that is not all. Trees for Africa has recently changed its name to Trees and Food for Africa because it is playing in increasingly important role in promoting food gardens, especially at schools. This has been done through the Eduplant programme, a schools competition whereby school children learn build food gardens and tackle environmental projects. I have therefore decided to support the Eduplant initiatives by providing a sum of R2 million which we hope will sustain this initiative for the next few years. The support to both these projects was made possible by a financial grant which my Department has received from a donor country.

I am extremely proud to be in a position to hand over the cheques to the Director of Trees and Food for Africa today. This cheque of R1,2 million is for the Urban Greening Fund. And the cheque of R2 million for the Eduplant schools competition. I would like to wish Trees For Africa enormous success with both projects..

Master of ceremonies, distinguished guests, I would like to thank you all for your time and commitment in promoting the greening of our country. My special thanks go to the Arbor Week organisers including the staff of my Department, Trees and Food for Africa and the corporate sponsor for Arbor Week, TOTAL South Africa. We also thank the community of Atteridgeville, the Pretoria City Council, and other sponsors and organisations their tireless efforts and contributions.

Viva Water Pure and Clean!
Viva Forests Rich and Green!