

EMBARGO: 13:30

**WELCOME BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
RONNIE KASRILS
AT THE LAUNCH OF WATER WEEK 2000
BRIDGETOWN, ATHLONE
15TH MARCH 2000**

President Mbeki, my Cabinet colleagues, Premier Morkel, Your Worship the Mayor, people of Bridgetown, ladies, gentlemen and friends.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the launch of Water Week 2000.

I would like to say a particular thank you to my Cabinet colleagues who have left a Cabinet meeting to attend this occasion.

To celebrate the launch, our President is going to lead us in a clean up of the Vygerskraal River.

Like so many of our rivers and waterways, the Vygerskraal has the potential to become a resource of value and beauty for the surrounding community. We hope that our symbolic act here today will encourage people all over the country in their efforts to clean and beautify the streams and rivers that run through their areas and to transform them for the benefit of all. Already we know that great efforts have been made here and elsewhere to achieve this goal.

Water Week is a very important date on our national calendar. It has become even more pertinent in the light of the recent floods and the extreme uncertainty and fluctuations in our climate.

Often we have too little water. Sometime we have too much. And ironically, too much rain may lead to too little water. In many areas, the floods have destroyed and damaged our water infrastructure. This will have to be repaired before proper water services can be restored. So, while people may appear to be surrounded in water, swept away by water, we should remember that they may not have a single clean and unpolluted drop to drink. Like the Ancient Mariner in the old poem by Coleridge, many of the people of our region gaze with despair at "Water, water everywhere. Nor any drop to drink".

This underlines the fact that water management and water security must be our priorities if we are to ensure our present and future supplies and meet our goal of providing a clean and reliable water supply to all our communities.

We will be celebrating Water Week 2000 with events all around the country. To mention one highlight ... Later this month, our President will act as plumber-in-chief in Midrand where he will roll up his sleeves and fix a leaking tap.

However, the activities that have been arranged for Water Week are not an end in themselves. They are designed to focus awareness on that most precious of all our natural resources; to give us all guidelines on how to conserve, manage and save our water ... every day of the year.

Our slogan for Water Week 2000 is "Everything works with water. Let's all work for water". This means that, while we understand the fundamental role water plays in our economic and domestic life, we cannot take it for granted. We must, all of us, find ways to work for the continued and equitable supply of water throughout our land.

I would like to end by asking you to join me in chanting this little poem that expresses the philosophy of Water Week 2000.

Turn off the tap
Don't let it leak
Save every drop
It's Water Week!

South Africa has
made a call
Let's build a better life
For all!

Let's save our water
Clean our streams
Let's work together
As a team
Viva water pure and clean!