

**SPEECH BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DONORS PROVIDING ASSISTANCE FOR THE WATER AND FORESTRY SECTOR ON 13 NOVEMBER 2000 AT 14:00 IN ROOM G18, EMANZINI BUILDING, 185 SCHOEMAN STREET, PRETORIA**

Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Senior Officials of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and the National Treasury.

I am pleased to welcome you here at this forum at the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry for the second time. Twelve busy months have elapsed since our previous meeting on 22 November 1999. Significant developments have taken place, which will have an impact on donor assistance to the water and forestry sector.

Let me start off by thanking the Donor Countries and Donor Agencies for the valuable support rendered to South Africa, and the Water and Forestry Sectors in particular, during this period. Without your assistance we could not have achieved the important milestones which I will try to highlight to you.

The main theme of the meeting is the existing and future needs of the Department for support and co-operation, as shown on the agenda. My officials will be responsible to give more details of our needs later in the meeting.

**International Donor Assistance Status Report of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry**

The International Donor Assistance Status Report of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is produced every 6 months, at the end of September and March, to summarise the current status of donor assistance to the Department.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has been very active to make use of Official Development Assistance (ODA) since the inception of the new democracy in 1994. The recent Development Co-operation Report (DCR) for South Africa for the period 1994 - 1999 concluded that about 10 % of all Official Development Assistance to South Africa went to one of the areas for which the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is responsible: to the water and sanitation sector.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has three main functional areas namely Water Resource Management, Forestry Management and Water Services (previously called community water supply and sanitation). The forestry sector also received a significant contribution while assistance to the water resource management sector has been growing since the start of the water law review process.

The vision and mission of the Department focuses on conserving, managing and developing our water resources and forests in a scientifically and environmentally sustainable manner in order to meet the social and economic needs of South Africa, both now and in future. This vision of equity and sustainability of resources is compatible with the objectives of most of the donor countries and agencies.

It is not the monetary value of international co-operation that is the most valued, but indeed the experience and expertise offered by our development partners, which cannot be measured in monetary terms.

While the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry treasures the contribution made towards the forestry and water sectors, I can only further invite donors to join hands with us as more work still lies ahead of us.

I will now elaborate more on the activities of my Department in the priority order of donor involvement, first water services, then forestry and finally, water resource management.

### **Water Services**

Since water supply and sanitation is constitutionally a local government function, my Department is increasingly focusing on supporting local government in the execution of its task rather than on direct service provision and project implementation. This support is targeted to what local government has to achieve, i.e. sustainable, affordable, efficient, effective, reliable water services. With this in mind support is being provided with regard to the following areas:

- Regulatory and legislative requirements
- Planning
- Service Operation
- Infrastructure provision

Our immediate focus, however, remains the provision of basic water services. Stated differently, the department is involved in poverty alleviation and helping to create a better life for all South Africans. We intend to integrate water services provision into the overall national rural development strategy.

### **Community Water Delivery**

Today we can report that the provision of basic water services to previously unserved people, since 1994 to date, has reached the 6-million mark, at a total cost of R3,7-billion. This means that within six years, the department has provided half of the 12-million people the government set out to reach in 1994, with safe drinking water.

Also, in the process 341 434 temporary jobs, including 180 000 jobs for mostly rural women where employment opportunities are scarce, were created in the laying of pipes and other infrastructural development linked to water services in the rural areas.

At the present expenditure rate, however, it will take us longer to deliver safe water to all South Africans than our initial target of the year 2007. At present approximately 8 million people in rural areas still don't have clean water. If we continue at this present expenditure rate it could take us up to 20 years to reach our goals with regard to the rural population.

The infrastructure development process - putting pipes into the ground - is progressing well albeit it not as fast as we would have preferred. It is important to remember that putting pipes into the ground is just the beginning. The real challenge

is keeping the water flowing from the taps. This brings me to the critical issue of sustainability and local government's role.

### **Role of Local Government**

In terms of the Constitution, local government is responsible for the provision of water services. My Department ensures that bulk water is collected, stored, purified, conserved, distributed and protected. A lack of capacity (such as efficient accounting systems, and effectively managing, operating and maintaining a water scheme) and inadequate funding at local level has resulted in taps sometimes running dry. In order to improve performance, the newly elected local government structures must be trained and empowered.

My Department has geared itself to provide a co-ordinated water services support programme to local government. In terms of this programme, local government is being assisted to develop water services development plans.

The Water Services Act, 1997 (Act 108 of 1997) provides a framework within which local governments can choose service providers such as public or private companies best able to meet the needs of their communities. My Department is assisting in this by producing model contracts as well as regulations to ensure that local government gets what it needs where it chooses to use the services of other organisations, public and private.

Because water supply is such a critical issue in poor communities which might not be attractive to private service providers, we are developing our water boards around the country as a family of public water service providers to help meet this need, not simply to supply bulk water to large industrial and urban consumers.

In addition, water users must be educated on how to manage, monitor and maintain their water systems. And this can only be achieved by close consultation with the community from the beginning.

### **Affordability**

Another urgent issue I want to highlight today is that of affordability and water pricing to ensure that all South Africans enjoy a basic right to life - that of the basic right to safe drinking water as guaranteed in our Constitution.

The World Water Vision presented at The Hague in March this year recommended full cost pricing of water services, assuming that the poor are in a position to pay their bills. In this respect the Vision, quite frankly, takes no recognition of the reality in developing countries, such as South Africa, with people for whom it is not a case of "will not pay" but "cannot pay".

I told the Stockholm Water Symposium in August this year that this full cost pricing formulation was simply unacceptable - a view shared by my colleagues in the Southern African Development Community and elsewhere in the developing world.

Our approach in South Africa should take account of the need for social justice and equity and the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable. The South African Government has given water a high priority, recognising that providing access to basic clean water supply is a direct attack on poverty.

The Government's acceptance of a policy that the basic water supply of 6 000 litres per household per month would be provided free to the poor, is a vital milestone. This will allow us to achieve sustainability with equity, bearing in mind that higher levels of consumption will have to be paid for. This process is well on its way, with an inter-ministerial committee comprising the Minister of Provincial Affairs and Local Government, the Minister of Finance and myself is discussing the implementation of delivering free water to the poor. I will shortly be calling on local governments, through their organisation, the South African Local Government Association (Salga), as well as provincial MEC's, the NGO Coalition (Sangoco) and organised labour to consider ways in which we can implement the President's announcement.

### **Forestry Management**

Ours was never a country blessed with plentiful indigenous forests. This is why, in the nineteenth century, when we still relied on wood for many needs, plantations were planted in many areas. In those days it was a strategic resource and hence a direct concern of government. This is no longer the case.

Governments need not grow pine trees, or pineapples or pumpkins for that matter! That is why we are implementing the Cabinet decision that government should not be in the business of farming trees.

We are approaching this in various ways. Our large forests have been put up for lease to large-scale investors. Our medium sized forests will be disposed of in ways that offer empowerment prospects to local business and serve regional needs. And, we are initiating the process of transferring small local "woodlots" to community management.

Community management of woodlots constitutes an important contribution to improving rural self-sufficiency. As much as 80 percent of rural people's energy needs are met by firewood, much of it carried daily on the heads of women. It is not for nothing that the forest is referred to "as the poor person's overcoat". I am determined to ensure that this category of woodlots – of community forests – is made economically viable and a productive part of the rural economy. These woodlots should have an important place in our integrated rural development strategy.

The management of our precious indigenous forests must also receive more focused attention. My Department is making the first inventory of all indigenous forests, which cover less than one percent of our total land area, so that appropriate management standards can be applied to each one. This inventory is expected to be completed by 2001. These forests played an important role as sites of resistance to colonial conquest, retain the sacred remains of great ancestors, are the repository of important herbs and medicines and need to be restored as far as is possible.

They can become part of our African Renaissance, centres of research and learning and, with proper control, sites for visitors and tourists who bring jobs and income to local people.

The first part of our forestry restructuring has been successfully concluded and excellent prices were obtained, after tough negotiation. Certain critical sites have

been removed for conservation and tourism purposes and tenders are already out for their development.

### **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 especially in areas bearing the brunt of our apartheid legacy, takes a great deal of time, money and dedication.

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 kick-start 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. The 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.

### **Water Resource Management**

The fact that I have left Water Resources Management for last does not in anyway imply that it is not a priority. The effective and sustainable management of our water resources is a crucial underpinning not only of our existing economic development, but of future programmes of poverty eradication and development as well.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is the national custodian of the water resources of South Africa. Water is a scarce natural resource and is a critical factor for the maintenance of human life, the water environment and for economic activities. The water resources management function of the Department includes:

- The planning of the national water resources,
- the development thereof,
- regulation of water allocation,
- regulation of water use for purposes of water demand management, abstractions and water quality management,
- information on water availability both of surface and ground water as well as its quality must be gathered and disseminated,
- control over dam safety, flood and drought management are also important components,
- many of the rivers of South Africa are shared with neighbouring countries and international co-operation is essential.

As you are all well aware, in 1998 the National Water Act, was passed. This is one of the most progressive pieces of water legislation in the world and the implementation of it is posing a number of challenges, which, if we address them correctly as we intend to do, will hold lessons not only for South Africa, but for the world as a whole.

Amongst other things, the challenge of implementing the National Water Act, includes the creation of participatory management systems for water resources, mainly through the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies. The National Water Act, 1998 requires widespread public consultation on a number of issues, including the establishment of these agencies. In a country where many of our people are beyond the reach of telephones, faxes and electricity, this poses particular challenges; challenges which are requiring my staff to acquire new skills and find new ways of working.

The National Water Act, also requires us to redress the racial and gender imbalances of water allocation of the past. This is an enormous challenge, and one, which requires interdepartmental co-ordination if we are to see positive impacts from such reallocation of water. One area where co-operative work has been progressing well, is in the field of support to emerging farmers. The Departments of Water Affairs, Agriculture, Public Works and others are working jointly on co-operative support systems for establishing and developing emerging farmers. This project, however, still has a great deal of work ahead before we can say that we have mastered this challenge.

A further challenge that we have been facing in the management of our water resources has been the move from a supply-driven paradigm to an integrated approach where infrastructure development and water demand management are harnessed in tandem to ensure the most beneficial and efficient use of our scarce water resources. We have made considerable strides in this regard, and the integrated approach being adopted by the Cape Metropolitan Council in this regard is one example of a more progressive approach being taken.

### **The Working for Water Programme**

The *Working for Water Programme* has proceeded successfully. Many Donor Agencies contributed to this programme. This programme is aimed at clearing invading alien plants: species that have been introduced into South Africa from elsewhere and have spread out of control. This is done to conserve ecological functioning and biological diversity; protect the productive potential of land; reduce the frequency of intense fires and floods; create employment opportunities and promote training for the poorest of the poor; develop secondary industries arising from the wood, (and water, land and trained people); to enhance water security.

The department's interest in this programme derives from the impact of invading alien plants on water resources. These plants cause a significant reduction in runoff in some areas – and this could increase if the plants continue to spread.

Some of the key statistics for the past year of the *Working for Water Programme* are:

- ◆ 92% of the programme's budget of R241 million was spent
- ◆ 20 999 people, largely from the marginalised sectors of our society, received employment and training in the programme during the past financial year.
- ◆ a total of 134 718 training days were provided.
- ◆ teams throughout the country cleared 238 823 hectares of invasive alien plant species.

### **Conclusion**

I have referred to a number of achievements of the Department of Water Affairs during the past year. In all of these areas, including the development of policy, donor assistance made a significant contribution to our achievements. I did not mention any of your contributions individually, because they are too many to mention.

I therefore again acknowledge with appreciation the generous assistance received from all of you during the period under review. Without your help, we cannot eradicate the terrible poverty which apartheid has bequeathed us. This is a classical example of a partnership that assists us in a pursuit of a better life and the improvement in the quality of life for all. I am looking forward to further collaboration and co-operation in the coming year.