

**ADDRESS BY  
THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY  
RONNIE KASRILS  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MASERU  
BYPASS/MOUNTAIN ROAD AND FEEDER ROADS  
Ha Mohale, Lesotho  
3 March**

Minister Moleleki, Principle Chief Seeiso, Mr Marumo, members of the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission, members of the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority, officials of my Department, local residents, colleagues and friends.

I am deeply honoured to be present at this important ceremony and happy to have had an excuse to visit your beautiful country.

Today I attend a happy event – the celebration of a development that will bring great benefits to both our people. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is a project that will greatly enrich our region, the lasting and beneficial consequence of the neighbourly collaboration of our two countries.

The Maseru by-pass, mountain and feeder roads are part of this project.

A road is a wonderful thing. It makes travel and social intercourse possible. It encourages trade and economic activity. And it brings opportunities to those who live nearby.

A road has a symbolic relevance too. It promises movement forward, progress and new and renewed relationships.

We have been proud to have contributed to the costs of the Maseru bypass where I attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony earlier today. And we are proud too to have paid for the reconstruction of Masianokeng to St Michael's Road and the upgrading of the mountain road leading to where we stand now. And, important as it is, this project is but a fraction of the collaborative work between Lesotho and South Africa in developing Phase 1B of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project embodies a number of important principles.

First, as I have mentioned, it expresses the spirit of co-operation, good neighbourliness and mutual respect between our two countries.

Second, it demonstrates that sustainable development cannot merely be a national project. Each of our countries depends on the simultaneous development of our neighbours. Our region must be allowed and encouraged to develop for the benefit of all. As you know, my government is deeply committed to our economic relationships with the countries in our region and, indeed, in Africa as a whole.

Third, this project provides yet another demonstration of a coincidence of interests for our region. We have been deeply impressed, for example, by the way you have tackled corruption in your country. This mirrors our own determination to crack down on corruption in South Africa. There are many

such examples. Yours is a country with which we share many interests and goals.

The fourth principle is very close to the hearts of those who cherish the natural environment and those who occupy it. Throughout this project, we have worked together to ensure that environmental degradation and disturbance to human life is kept to an absolute minimum. We will also ensure that the EAP and all compensation and rehabilitative measures conform to international best practice.

The fourth principle is, of course, that development must be people-centred. Those who live close to the dam can be assured, not only that it will be built to the highest technical standards, but that every effort is being made to ensure that they benefit from the opportunities it offers for local development. We are, indeed, presently looking at ways to improve the opportunities for children living in this area.

Finally, I believe that we in southern Africa can make an important contribution to global debates on water management and security. In two weeks time, my colleague Minister Moleleki and I will be part of the SADC delegation to the Senior Ministers' Meeting to be held in parallel to the Second World Water Forum in the Netherlands. There the participating countries will work with the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership to bring a common vision to the issue of water security on our planet. SADC plans to make a unique contribution. We believe we have an important role to play in this crucial discussion.

By now you will understand that we see the Lesotho Highlands Water Project as a great deal more than simply providing a much needed water resource for South Africa and Lesotho, supremely important though that goal is. We see it as a critical step forward for our region as a whole, a blueprint for a variety of collaborative projects and ventures in the future.

Only recently, we have had confirmation that our destinies in southern Africa are bound together. Mozambique is suffering from a terrible catastrophe, with loss of life and property and awful damage to its economy. The most urgent need is for assistance in saving lives and providing emergency relief for the unfortunate victims. Both our countries have quickly rallied to provide assistance. Mozambique's plight demonstrates again the need for regional co-operation and the helping hand that close neighbours states must be ever ready to give one another.

Once again, I would like to say how pleased and proud I am to be here on this most auspicious occasion and I hope and trust that our governments will continue to meet, to discuss and to co-operate well into the future.

I thank you.