

**ADDRESS BY
THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
RONNIE KASRILS
AT THE CEREMONY TO MARK THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
MASERU BYPASS/MOUNTAIN ROAD AND FEEDER ROADS
Mphorosane, Lesotho
4 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.

Once again, I would like to say how honoured I am to attend these important celebrations and how much I am enjoying my visit to your country. Yesterday I was privileged to participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Hatsolo and Ha Mohalo and to participate in the meeting at the Katse Operational Centre.

I was very glad to see how carefully the needs of the local community had been considered, and heartened by the way local people have been involved in the project. Jobs and training have been provided, extended families have been supported and important new access roads have been opened, improving opportunities for commercial activity and social interaction. The ferry service is to be continued, I understand, giving local operators the opportunity to take it over commercially.

This is indeed a truly people-centred development.

Later today, I am being taken on a visit to some of your nature reserves. This inspires me to talk a little about the enormous importance of conservation on the one hand, and of the potential for the development of tourism. Indeed, as we know, the one depends on the other. Our efforts to conserve the natural beauty and richness of our environment lay the foundation for a sound tourism policy. People from all over the world are attracted by the nature reserves and stunning landscapes of Southern Africa. We need to continue to build awareness of the value of these natural assets.

This is a big opportunity – and a big challenge – for those who live around Katse and the nature reserves. They have the potential to develop tourism, eco-tourism and thus exploit the vast opportunities offered by the project and the natural beauty of the area.

I said yesterday how much my government values the increased co-operation between our two countries. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is a fine example of this. And now our two countries have also begun to take significant steps in building co-operation around nature conservation.

The Maluti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project is a tremendously exciting venture, with the potential to make a substantial contribution to our natural environment. The reserves I will visit later – Bokong, Muela and Tsehlanyane – are all part of this enormously important joint project, which aims to group Lesotho conservation sites with sites in South Africa.

Our countries and our governments share many visions. One of the most important of these is our determination that development must be people-centred and sustainable. This vision has been expressed in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and its related activities. It must be carried forward in the Maluti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project which will offer similar benefits for local inhabitants. For the people involved, this means not only jobs, but the skills that lead to other opportunities. For the environment, it means careful planning and management so that the natural advantages of the region are preserved.

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project and the Maluti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project will both greatly enrich our region, demonstrating the lasting and beneficial consequence of the neighbourly collaboration of our two countries.

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.