

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY  
RONNIE KASRILS, MP  
AT THE RENAMING OF THE CHELMSFORD DAM  
TO NTSHINGWAYO DAM  
Newcastle  
6 August 2000**

Deputy President, Mr Jacob Zuma

His Majesty, King Goodwill Zwelithini

Ministers of the National Cabinet

Premier of KwaZulu-Natal

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Executive Council

Your Worship - The Mayor of Newcastle and the Chairperson of the Umzinyathi  
Regional Council

Councillors - Members of the Executive Councils of Transitional Local Councils

Amakhosi and

Distinguished Guests

“What’s in a name”, asked Juliet, when she realised that Romeo of the House of Montague was the son of her family’s bitter rival. “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” she hoped. She was wrong, of course. The name of a person is the stamp of their identity and their ancestry. The name of a place reflects the perspective of those who did the naming.

For anybody who travels in South Africa, or studies its place names on a map, it is quite clear what that perspective was; who conquered and held the power here and when they did so. All over the country, there are signs of British occupation, revealed in the names of towns, natural features and streets. And, as one would expect, all over the country there are Afrikaans names, signposts put up by the Trekkers and their descendents. All too often, the original names for South African places were simply ignored and discarded, as were the people who suffered at the hands of the oppressors.

For example, the Garieb River lost its Khoisan name when it was renamed the Orange and the Lekoe was renamed the Vaal, after a place in Holland, and here in KwaZulu-Natal the Ncome river was re-named the Blood River in Trekker celebration of Dingaan's defeat.

Some places we have already renamed. Verwoerdburg, named after the man known as the architect of apartheid, was seen as offensive and has been renamed Centurion. And Sophiatown, torn to the ground during the terrible reign of the Group Areas Act, and cynically named Triomf as a sign of victory over the people whose lives were shattered, has now regained its former name. And closer to home, in renaming the Pretoria buildings occupied by my own Department, we have selected names that reflect the diversity of our people and the richness of our languages names such as Sedibeng, eManzini, Waterbron and ZwaMadaka.

We are here today to rename the Chelmsford Dam. It took its name from the farm on which it was built. Chelmsford is a small town in England and also the name of a British General who invaded this country. I am here today to tell you why I consider this event, and other acts of renaming undertaken by my government, both essential and of enormous significance.

There are some who object strenuously to the idea of renaming and, indeed, I have already had complaints about this particular event. But to those who still doubt that renaming is an important part of the larger process of transforming our country, I would like to cite the statistics. There are 174 large dams in South Africa. 104 – just on 60 percent – of those dams have Afrikaans names. Some of them names that were imposed on local communities, often carelessly replacing existing names – names like Witklip, Bronkhorstspuit, Bushmanskrans, Tonteldoos and Poortjieskloof. (Others, which have already been changed by my predecessor, were monuments to apartheid figures such as Fanie Botha, Hans Strijdom, PK le Roux and Hendrik Verwoerd).

Twenty-five dams have English names, many of them reflecting British or Scottish ancestry, such as Glen Alpine and Donnybrook or British leaders such as Churchill. The name of Chelmsford, of course, has an even more unfortunate ring in the history of our country, for it was the British general Lord Chelmsford who led the invasion against King Cetshwayo and the Zulu Kingdom in 1879. Some names draw from farther afield and are strangely named Jericho, Arabie or Armenia. One is regrettably named after the Portuguese slave trader Albasini and I want to make it clear that name will also be changed, as soon as I have consulted with the local people in Northern Province. Only 44 out of the 174 large dams have African names.

Now, in my view, a dam should not be a monument to a particular ruling or landowning class as has so often happened in the past. The purpose of a dam is to provide water to the people who live in an area. It is built on land inhabited by people who have traditions, a shared history and a sense of community. As such, it must respect the views of that community within the context of the national framework of transformation.

This is what we considered when we were trying to decide what we should rename the Chelmsford Dam. We looked for a name that would reflect some of the history of this area and, in the process, would also acknowledge the courage of those who fought fearlessly against the invading forces that sought to overthrow and subjugate the people who lived here. This spirit is encapsulated in one great battle of resistance at Isandlwana, on January 22 1879, at which the invading British were defeated in one of the most humiliating battles in Britain's colonial history.

Inkosi Ntshingwayo kaMahole Khoza was a senior general in King Cetshwayo's army and the hereditary chief of the Khoza in north-western Zululand. Born in 1809, he was a chief in the tradition of Shaka and must indeed have known that great leader. His high rank in the kingdom and his recognised abilities as a warrior made him a natural

choice as a senior commander. At this stage, you are probably picturing a young and virile man, strong of limb and full of youthful daring. In fact, at the time of the battle of Isandlwana, Ntshingwayo was a remarkable 70 years old. He died, not in the peace of his home, but at the Battle of Ulundi, defending his King, country and people.

Ntshingwayo lived and died in the defence of the life and rights of his people. He was a patriot and a hero. The sacrifice he and so many others made during the colonial wars against the indigenous people of this country must not be forgotten. It is a symbol of the courage of all those who opposed colonialism and oppression over the years, and must serve as a reminder of the long and bitter struggle waged to liberate the people of this land. A struggle waged not only by the Zulu people, but by all who lived and died for the ideal of freedom and justice in South Africa.

Our President has painted for us a vision of an Africa reborn ... a renaissance of our Continent, based on the ideals of democracy, prosperity and cultural celebration. Unlike the 'divide and rule' philosophy of the colonial and apartheid eras, the vision of the African Renaissance is one of common interests, common goals and a pride in who we are and what we can achieve together.

In renaming the places in which we live and work and from which we derive our resources and wealth, we need to keep this vision in mind. We must reflect the cultural and historical richness of our past. We must honour those who have been denigrated or ignored and remember and immortalise them. Above all, we must cherish the sensitivities and traditions of the living.

This is why I am so delighted that our decision to name this dam after the military strategist Inkosi Ntshingwayo kaMahole Khoza has been received with such enthusiasm by the local leadership. I am most happy to welcome members of the transitional local council of Newcastle, led by their Mayor, and the regional council of

Umzinyathi, led by their Chairperson. Both councils have taken resolutions to give this renaming their fullest support.

Finally, I am, of course, most particularly honoured to welcome Your Majesty, King Goodwill Zweletini, who has graciously agreed to join us here today. His Majesty has been most supportive of many of our efforts and is a Water Patron of our country. It is an honour to participate with His Majesty in this renaming ceremony, which coincides with his birthday celebrations. He has also given his support to my idea of planting trees in remembrance of those who have given their lives for our freedom and democracy and we will, today, be planting at this site a tree to the memory of Ntshingwayo.

I would like to use this occasion to appeal to communities throughout our country who may feel it appropriate to change the insensitive names of the past given to the dams in their areas. We will give their suggestions careful consideration and consult with provincial, local and traditional structures as well as approaching the matter from a national perspective. These names should evoke pride in our history and culture and the only stipulation is that we will not name such structures after living persons.

This is an auspicious occasion and one that will play its part in restoring and building pride in our culture, our traditions and our heroes. Such an occasion affirms our shared sense of national destiny and the lessons of our history that teaches us the need for unity as the necessary foundation for peace, prosperity and development. We South Africans can indeed look back and honour those who fought courageously for the freedom of our people over several centuries, many of whom gave their lives for what we have today. We celebrate the fact that we are living in a free and democratic country, as part of one community of citizens, united in our diversity and rich in our shared nationhood.