

**SPEECH BY  
MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP,  
MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY  
ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF MATSOKU WEIR  
AND  
DIVERSION TUNNEL – MATSOKU IN LESOTHO  
ON  
26 OCTOBER 2001**

His Majesty, King Letsie III , RE Hon PM Mosisili, my Colleague Hon Monyane Moleleki,

The Principal Chief of Matsieng, Minister Moleleki, Members of the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission, the acting Chief Executive and members of the LHDA, members of the local community, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.  
Sechaba Sa mona Kaufela – Bo Mme le bo Ntati Dumelang  
Khotso, Pula Nala!

I am honoured to be taking part in this ceremony to inaugurate the Matsoku Weir and Tunnel, a milestone event in the development of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. It was a great experience when together with my brother, Ntati Monyane Moleleki, we used the power of our fingers and pressed buttons to open the gates of the Weir.

I feel privileged to once again be in the uniquely beautiful and tranquil highlands of Lesotho and experience the joy of participation and observing the dancing, singing, culture. Kialaboga. I return to a country at peace with itself, so much so that one understands why the founder of this nation, the Great King Moshoeshoe himself, referred to it as, “**Lefatse la Khotso**” (“The land of Peace”).

Dear Friends

The significance of today's event must be seen against the background of important regional developments. It must first of all be seen within the context of the significant role that the LHWP has played in the relations between our two countries for a decade and a half. It must be appreciated as yet a further manifestation of the kind of practical co-operation that we all know is essential for the achievement of the goals of the Southern African Development Community. It is a building block in our shared vision of an African Continent prepared to take charge of its own destiny. It is above all a celebration of the enduring relevance of the principles of good neighbourliness, sovereign equality, (and) co-operation and mutual respect. These are principles, which my country, South Africa cherishes and considers as central to all our dealings with our neighbours.

South Africa is fully committed to economic co-operation with all our neighbours, not least with Lesotho. This we see as essential to the achievement of a robust regional economy. We commit to this not just as a manifestation of good neighbourliness, but also in the pragmatic view that our own growth can only be assured through our joint development with our neighbours. President Mbeki visited Lesotho in April of this year, to among other things, affirm this commitment. His undertaking to strive to assist Lesotho to grow out of its current least developed country status was made within this context. Here it must be understood that "least developed" is an international term related to the colonial legacy of the past. In fact, Lesotho has a wealth of culture and must be regarded as a superpower in this regard. It is also done in the spirit of the New African initiative that was (recently) endorsed by the Heads of State of the African Union, at their Summit in Malawi recently. As you will all know President Mbeki has and continues to play an active role in efforts to make this vision a reality.

In a practical manifestation of this spirit of co-operation for the common good, our officials have worked diligently over the past few weeks to hammer together a package that has made it possible to resolve some long outstanding issues. As a result, my colleague and Brother, Minister Moleleki and I, have agreed at our meeting in Maseru yesterday a way forward on Cost Allocation for Operations and Maintenance, and on Royalty Hydrology. This marks a significant step forward and should facilitate progress on many fronts.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are currently working very closely with our development partners, other developing countries, and our neighbours, to prepare for the World Summit on Sustainable Development which will be held in Johannesburg in September of next year. This important event presents us with the renewed challenge to again take stock of how we have performed against international standards of sustainable development. Let us accept that challenge and take a critical look at our policies and achievements in implementing our own Environmental Action Plan. To what extent are the people whose lives and livelihoods we have affected by this intervention better off than they were at first interaction? What remedial action are we taking to ensure compliance where called for? Are we optimally employing available resources or adequately complementing them where necessary? Do we continue to be cost effective or have we allowed our bureaucracy to outgrow the work at hand? These are some of the pertinent questions that we should ask ourselves if we are to ensure the sustainability of our common endeavour.

As regards our immediate challenges on the Project, my colleague and brother, Minister Monyane Moleleki and I, have issued very clear instructions to our officials on the Commission to prepare sound proposals for an in-stream flow requirement (IFR) program based on scientifically monitored downstream impacts of Phase I of the Project.

Matsoku weir distinguishes itself from other dams in that it will divert floodwaters while continuing to release normal flows downstream. It will also be possible to simulate floods in mitigation, when necessary as part of a future compensatory flow policy

We will also expect to see proposals for a thorough consultation process to be undertaken with the affected communities, especially those living downstream of Katse and Mohale dams and Matsoku weir. We are fully aware of the international significance of this stage of the project given that we are engaged in what is a pioneer endeavour. For this and other reasons we appreciate the international interest it may elicit and wish to assure all concerned that we take the matter of IFR very seriously and will do all to ensure that the highest standards are maintained.

As signatories of the Revised SADC Protocol on Shared Water Course Systems we are proud of our record, the principles that guide our collaboration and the functioning of our co-operative structures in implementing the tenets of that important regional instrument. As a matter of fact we can proudly say that we have gone further than merely sharing the watercourse, but are happily sharing its benefits. In the same spirit, we have gladly agreed to join Lesotho in exploring the possibilities of jointly developing the Lesotho Lowlands Water Scheme. This is a project that is primarily intended to augment water supply to Maseru, primarily drawing water from the shared waters of the Caledon River, which is a tributary of the Orange-Senqu River. Formal meetings have begun

on the matter and basic principles have been agreed. Our two sets of officials have already agreed a process to share information, especially relating to studies already done on the South African side.

This brings me to yet another benefit that has accrued to us as a result of our co-operation. The potential for tourism that the project brings to the Maluti Mountains is there for all to see. It has already signalled this potential through the growing numbers of visitors to the project week after week. The nature reserves developed by the Project have opened up a whole new aspect that further showcases the serene beauty of the Maluti. The nature reserves of Bokong, Tsehlanyane and Liphofung have been described as destinations of world standard. Well run and appropriately marketed, they stand to benefit Lesotho immensely. Similarly with the Maluti- Drakensberg Trans-frontier Park which is another promising co-operative effort undertaken by our two countries. I wish to come back here again as a “Madala” and participate in various tourism activities such as fishing, hiking, boating, camping and visiting with the locals.

The challenge to the Project is to ensure that the Communities that have been affected by it as well as their host and other rural communities benefit directly from the tourism industry. We have therefore been encouraged to learn that efforts are underway within the LHWP, to study available options and to draw up firm proposals towards this end. I know that such proposals will be thoroughly work-shopped in consultation with the people they are intended to serve.

Finally, my brother Minister Moleleki, allow me once again to express my personal joy at this opportunity to be with you today and to be a part of this important event. On behalf of the government and people of South Africa, I wish to repeat our good wishes for this beautiful country and its people, and to

pledge our enduring commitment to stand with the people of Lesotho as we face the challenges of our shared future. I thank you.

KHOTSO! PULA! NALA!