

19 March 2001, Monday

11.00 – 11.15am

Keynote Address by Minister Kasrils: Launch of National Water Week 2001, Ngwelezana

Honourable guests – Ministers, King Goodwill Zwelethini, Amakhosi, Mr Thulani Gcabashe (CEO of Eskom), Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address you at this launch of National Water Week 2001, particularly in this area of Kwazulu-Natal where the first cases of cholera were detected in August 2000.

Those of us with taps, and clean drinking water, have watched with horror the daily reports on the cholera outbreak. The death of any one South African from a water borne disease is one too many. Over a hundred, is untenable.

What the cholera outbreak has brought home to us in South Africa, is that this is a disease of poverty. As our President has said, there are still two nations in this beautiful country of ours. There are those who read about cholera in the news papers, or watch the reports on TV. And there are those who watch their sisters and uncles, grandparents and children, die of this easily preventable disease.

We should not forget that South Africa boasts some of the best health care in the world. South Africa was, after all, one of the leading nations in heart operations; many of our hospitals

(particularly private hospitals) are as good as the best in the world. Why then do we still have people dying of cholera?

The answer is simple. Too many of our people still live in poverty. Too many of our people still do not have access to safe water. Too many of our people do not have access to proper sanitation. Too many of our people cannot easily get to hospitals and clinics.

I say this, knowing that we have brought water to 10 million South Africans since 1994. I say this knowing that we have provided free health care, built clinics, built houses, built roads, provided educational facilities to our people.

But I say this knowing that until we can say, in all honesty, that not one South African child has died from a preventable water borne disease, we have not done enough. The responsibility of a government is to look after the welfare of its people. This government has done a great deal in that regard. But there is still more to do.

There are a number of challenges facing us in the water sector, and I would like to outline a few of them.

The first is the challenge of implementing the policy of six thousand litres of water per household per month free of charge. Our Constitution enshrines the right of all South Africans to have access to sufficient water. We cannot claim to be fulfilling this right if we are charging people for water for which they cannot afford to pay.

Nearly half of the population of South Africa live in poverty. These people cannot afford to pay for water. If they pay for water they will have to eat less, despite being already undernourished. Or they will have to return to fetching water from possibly contaminated springs and rivers. If we, as government, are to take our responsibility of providing water access to sufficient water to all, then we must provide sufficient water for sustaining life, free of charge.

The challenge we are facing at the moment, is how to implement this. We need to ensure that we have the necessary funding and administrative mechanisms in place to make this work. This is, however, a priority. We must implement this policy soon. The well being of our nation will be enhanced by this step.

At the same time, however, we must broaden our focus to the sanitation area as well. What the cholera outbreak has highlighted, painfully, is that we have not put enough resources into ensuring that all South Africans have access to, and use, proper sanitation facilities. This too, is not as easy as it sounds. Experience from neighbouring countries has shown us that it is not sufficient simply to build toilets. Without proper education facilities, they too easily become store cupboards while people continue to answer the call of nature outdoors, as they did in the past. We do not want to move from the apartheid era of toilets in the veld to another era of toilet storerooms in the veld!

We will have to put considerable resources and energy into a programme that parallels the physical building of toilets with the hygiene education necessary to convince people that they must use them. In this regard, I believe that our schools have an important role to play. Often, as any parent will know, the pupil becomes the teacher of the parent, bringing home new information, new behaviours, new understanding of the world.

The third aspect of managing water that I would like to highlight, is the question of protecting our rivers, lakes and wetlands. Rivers are the blood vessels of the land. They carry life giving water within them. As with our blood, if the water becomes too contaminated by pollutants, it is not only the rivers that die, but the organisms that depend on them too. For the future of our country, we must protect our rivers.

We must protect them against those people who through their litter and rubbish into them. We must protect them against those people who dispose of their effluent into them, regardless of the consequences. We must protect them against those who drain them dry, who destroy their banks and beds. We must protect them against those who have lost their respect for life.

The possible pollutants in our rivers range from the pathogens causing diseases such as cholera, to heavy metals from mining, and chemical pollutants from factories. My department is doing what it can to minimise the pollution and destruction of our water resources, but we need the assistance of all South Africans in this.

We must reawaken, amongst our people, a respect for our rivers. We must instill in all South Africans the understanding that our health, our economy, our future, is dependent on how well we look after this precious resource.

The National Water Act gives us the mandate to set up new institutions for managing our precious water resources. Over the next ten years, we will be setting up 19 catchment management agencies around the country to take over some of the functions currently done by the department. These agencies will have a key role to play in ensuring the protection of our water resources, and in reducing pollution.

The great challenge, however, is to ensure that stakeholders in the catchments are involved in the establishment of these agencies, and that they can give input into the decisions around water use which may affect them. The greatest challenge is how to reach out to communities such as this one, to ensure that people who did not have a say in the past, people who have not historically had access to water, can become part of the process of deciding how water should be used, and who should have access to it.

These agencies will not be dealing with the provision of treated drinking water to communities. They will be dealing with the water in our rivers, in our wetlands, in our dams. I am looking forward to the day on which I can say, with confidence, that the people of South Africa, rich and poor, black and white, women and men, understand, and are involved in, the decision making around our water resources. Then I will be sure that our water resources will be in good hands, in the hands of the people.

Ladies and gnetlemen, friends, distinguished colleagues, the challenges before us are many. But as we have proved over the past seven years, the people of South Africa, and the government that you have put in place, can rise to these challenge.

Today is the beginning of National Water Week, the annual event during which we put extra effort into educating our people about the value of water. This year, we are focusing on protecting our water resources, on the need for clean water, and on the need for proper sanitation and hygiene in order to protect the health of our people.

Our slogan this year is water is life: Amanzi ayimpilo. Without water there is no life. Without sufficient clean water, there is no life.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The challenge to ensure that all South Africans have access to sufficient water remains with us. But we will meet it.

The challenge to ensure that all South Africans live in an environment not harmful to their health or well being is still with us. But we will meet it.

The challenge to ensure that poverty is eradicated in South Africa is still with us. But we will meet it.

And we will meet them together - Izandla ziyagezana (one hand washes the other).

Viva water pure and clean. Viva!

11.15 – 11.20 am

19th March 2001

Speech for the Expansion of the Madlebe Water Scheme

Minister Ronnie Kasrils, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Sanibonani nonke, greetings friends. I am delighted to be here with you to celebrate not only National Water Week, but also to celebrate the real achievement of bringing water to the people of South Africa.

South Africa is a water scarce country. Compared to many other countries in the world, we do not have a great deal of water. We do not have many big rivers, and we often experience devastating droughts. In the midst of this, however, white South Africans have, for many years, been able to open taps in their houses and drink some of the safest, cleanest water in the world.

When the ANC came to power, 12 million black South Africans were without water. We have put a great deal of money and effort since then, in bringing water to those communities who didn't previously have water. We have not succeeded yet, but the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has brought water to 7 million South Africans.

Now we are taking the next step forward, and that it to try to ensure that we provide a certain amount of water (6 000 litres) to each household, each month, free of charge. This is something that will be implemented in the future. It is not in place yet. So, in the meantime, we are calling on communities to continue to pay for the water that they are receiving. Providing a small amount of free water to each household, free of charge, is not an easy task. We must still work out where, as government, to find

the money to pay for this. We must still put in place the administrative systems to make it work. We will tell you as soon as we are ready to implement it. In the meantime, things must continue as they are, with communities paying for their water.

We must also, as responsible citizens, ensure that our water projects are carefully looked after. We have had situations, around the country, where taps and pipes have been vandalised. These assets have been brought to communities at great expense to the government. There are still communities that do not have safe water yet. We do not want to have a situation where the projects that have been put in are damaged by a few wilful, senseless people, who do not realise the importance of water to the health and well-being of the community. I am calling on you, each and every one, to ensure that these valuable assets are protected and well cared for.

We are also moving towards the delivery of water services being done at local government. Our Constitution says that local government must provide water services. For many years, local government was not able to do this, and so we did it through national government. Now it is time for these processes to be handed over to local authorities. My department is, therefore, supporting the uThungulu District Municipality, so that they can provide the services as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen, this scheme here at Madlebe, was completed in August 2000. Since then, just over one million rand was made available to upgrade the scheme to communal taps within 100 metres of each household. This project is now nearing completion, and so it is with great honour that I am here, to “open” this extended and

improved scheme. May the taps always bring you the water that is needed for life.

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Notes

The Madlebe Community Water Supply Scheme is located in the lower Umfolozi Magisterial District, and its bulk water is obtained from the Emapangeni / Ngewelezana TLC. This scheme was completed in August 2000. It supplies water to eleven wards:

- Matshana, Sigisi, Odondolo, Bomvini, Mtengu, Nqutshini, Ndabayakhe, Nkosozana, Mankwanyaneni, Iniwe, and Benyingoma.

In the northern area a population of about 13 952, while in the southern area about

8 896 people are served. Water is dispensed through 250 Bambananzi prepaid meters, and it is estimated that approximately 1 200kl/month is used. Madlebe Amanzi is recognised as the Water Service Provider in the community.

The expansion of the scheme includes the transfer of ownership and responsibility for the scheme from DWAF to the WSA. It is planned that by July 2005 this transfer would have been completed.

