

MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS' SPEECH
NATIONAL ARBOR WEEK 03 SEPTEMBER 2001
THABONG TOWNSHIP (WELKOM)

Premier Winkie Direko, MEC for housing Mr. FL.Phseloli, MEC for Environment Mr. Sakhiwo Belot, MEC for Welfare Ms Beatrix Marshoff, Representatives from AngloGold, Pick 'n Pay, Total SA, Ladies and gentlemen.

We are here today to celebrate National Arbor Week, which is a week in which we recognise the social, economic and ecological importance of trees in our society. The theme of Arbor Week this year is **“Trees are Life-Mehlare ke bophelo”**. There are several messages that we ask you to help us to spread throughout South Africa. Forests are important for a number of reasons:

- Indigenous forests: We have very little natural forest in South Africa and it is very important that we protect the little we have. Natural forests are part of our cultural heritage and are considered to be sacred places throughout our country. They are home to rare trees, birds and animals and also provide us with medicines and herbs.
- Commercial forests: Plantation Forests provide jobs and economic opportunities for many of our people in rural areas. These benefits are sometimes destroyed by fires and we therefore ask all South Africans to help prevent veld and forest fires.

- Greening: Trees in our cities, towns, townships, rural areas and informal settlements help to provide a better environment to live in and thereby contribute to the dignity of our people. We therefore ask all South Africans to contribute by planting trees in our homes, schools, community centres and places of worship.

Arbor Week is an ideal opportunity for commemorating people who have been involved in the struggle for liberation in this country or for those who have made significant contributions in their community. Trees can be planted in memory of those people. My Department has launched a Remembrance Campaign to give us the opportunity to enter the names of all the people who are commemorated in this way into a Remembrance Register.

The focus of this event is about the importance of trees in the environment and our daily lives. More and more South Africans live in urban areas in our country and many of our townships and previously disadvantaged areas have not had the benefit of proper planning in terms of housing, roads, open space management and greening. As a result of this, people living in these areas lack adequate recreational facilities, beautiful parks and green streets. This means that we have a great responsibility to ensure that we work with local Government to ensure that greening programmes take place in all our urban areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today six hundred trees will be donated to the inhabitants of the RDP housing in Thabong as part of a “Trees for Homes Greening Project” which is a joint effort between my Department, Food and Trees for Africa and the community. I

hope that this project will lead to a bigger greening initiative by your Local Council and other stakeholders. I recognise however that although Local Government is the main provider of urban greening services, they cannot do this alone. Other role players such as Community Based Organisations, Non-governmental Organisations and the corporate sector should give this initiative their full support.

The greening programme, which is being started here today, is a very good example of how a partnership between Government, Non-governmental Organisations, the corporate sector and communities can be established. I am delighted that AngloGold is contributing trees towards the reclamation of mine dumps in this area. I am also pleased to learn that this project is implemented in association with the schools in this area. I believe that schools are the best platform for establishing community development projects since learners of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. Projects like this can only be sustainable if children are involved because they will ensure that the quality of life, which they experience now, will be sustained in future.

These trees will make a difference to the quality of life of the inhabitants of this area. The benefits of a greening initiative are many, for instance: the provision of shade, windbreaks, recreation and parks facilities as well as opportunities for environmental education. These are just a few, besides the universal benefits of the provision of oxygen, climate management and the filtering effects of air and noise pollution. I call on those members of the community who will be receiving these trees, to look after them, water and care for them so that this project can be sustained.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you all for your efforts in promoting Arbor Week. My special thanks go to the sponsors: Total SA, Pick 'n Pay Anglogold and other sponsors that have contributed financially or in kind. I would like to thank the organisers for their tireless efforts in making this event a success. Thank you all for celebrating Arbor Week here with me today.