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WHY PARTNERSHIPS PAY OFF: LESSONS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Honoured guests, conference participants. It is delightful to be here in the USA, and in these beautiful surrounds of Miami, Florida. It is a singular honour to be invited to give the keynote address at the 2001 WWF Annual Conference. My appreciation to the WWF for bringing me here and to WWF USA for proving to be such charming and excellent hosts and providing such and interesting programme of events.

It is, perhaps, a particularly appropriate time to examine the role that partnerships can play in our struggle for sustainable development in this complex and yet fragile modern world. Appropriate because the horrific events of September 11 and after have reminded us all just how interrelated and interdependent we all are. May I take this opportunity to quote the famous bard, Robbie Burns, who stated over 200 years ago: "Countless thousands mourn mans inhumanity to man". Billions of decent minded mortals mourn with the people of the USA the abomination and loss of life of September 11th. Yet at this time of cruel adversity, we are all inspired by America's courage and resolve. I can think of nothing more befitting than Pete Seeger's battle hymn of the sixties "We shall overcome."

Globalisation is a reality that holds each and every one of us in a chain of interconnectedness and requires that we work together to achieve our goals at all levels, local, national and global. It is also appropriate that we examine the partnerships through which we work together because, in a few short months, the World Summit on Sustainable Development will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa. From New York to London, Nairobi to Lima, Canberra to Kyoto and Kabul, we need to understand and learn how best to work together to achieve a better life for all the people of the planet, today and tomorrow and take those lessons together with the lessons of September 11th to the Johannesburg Earth Summit.

In the ten years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, since the development of Agenda 21, the world has changed substantially. In some ways it has changed for the better, in some ways for the worse. On the environmental front, much has improved, much has degenerated.

What has not changed is the division of the world into those in Hemingway's phrase that have, and those that have-not. More people live in poverty today than ten years ago. In a world in which technological developments allow "surgical strikes", cloning of animals, space exploration and laser surgery, millions of people do not have sufficient food to meet their daily nutritional requirements, over a billion people do not have clean water to drink and more than that lack adequate sanitation facilities. In a world of computer technology, cellular telephones and the virtual office, millions of children die each year from the easily preventable diseases of poverty like malnutrition and dysentery.

In South Africa we are well placed to understand this dichotomy since we are "a world in one country" - a world in one country not only because of our diverse and rich natural heritage and the ethnic diversity of our people, but because within our borders we find the very rich and the very poor side by side. In South Africa we encounter, daily, the haves and the have-nots. And in South Africa we grapple with the challenge of how best to eradicate poverty and build a more equitable society, and how our natural resources can aid us in this battle.

South Africa is awakening from a past based on over three centuries of colonialism and 42 years of institutionalised apartheid. Inherent in that ideology was the right of the minority to own, exploit and enjoy our valuable natural resources: land, minerals and water and lord it over the rest. At the height of the apartheid era, just over 10% of the population controlled more than 80% of the land. The rest of our people, mainly black, were forced from their land into wage labour, into poverty and into second class citizenship and those who resisted were met with fierce repression.

When we finally achieved a democratic government in 1994, the eradication of poverty was (and remains) our major concern. Despite being a middle income country, despite the major improvements made since 1994, nearly half our people still live in poverty; one in six still do not have access to clean water; (in 1994 that figure was one in three) and one in three lack adequate sanitation. Despite government having built over 1,250 million houses, equalised education and built many clinics - literacy, housing and medical care remain inadequate for much of the population.

Shortly after the landmark elections of 1994, the South African Government instituted two major fast-track implementation programmes: the Community Water Supply programme and the Working for Water programme. The former aimed to bring clean water to the 14 million rural people without access at that time; the latter to control alien vegetation through a labour intensive poverty relief programme.

While these programmes were implemented, other initiatives were launched to develop the longer term policy and legislature framework governing water service provision by local government and the sustainable management of both indigenous and plantation forestry. In addition, a fundamental revision was made of water resources policy to ensure that despite our relatively arid and variable climate, South Africa could grow and develop on a sustainable basis.

In the past few years, both programmes have enjoyed considerable success. The community water supply and sanitation programme has provided water to over seven million, addressing half the backlog inherited in 1994 and, in doing this, meeting the UN's Millennium target which is to reduce by half the number without basic services by 2015.

The challenge of addressing the needs of the remaining seven million is being addressed with great vigour and will be completed by 2008.

The Working for Water programme has accomplished initial clearance of over 700 000 hectares of land to date, and completed follow-up work on 500 000 hectares. It currently provides short term employment to 24 000 people in 313 projects in all nine provinces. Given its Poverty Relief focus - the major source of funding is the government's Poverty Relief Programme - it is designed to achieve its environmental objective while assisting the most marginalised in society uniquely interconnecting both social and environmental needs. Thus it draws from the "poorest of the poor": women (particularly those in single-headed households), youth, the disabled, ex-combatants of the liberation struggle and ex-offenders, principally those living in rural areas. The programme also seeks to implement related social programmes, supporting child care facilities and promoting HIV/AIDS education.

We have also made substantial progress in the long term policy domain, in both water and forestry, greatly supported by our immediate, visible, achievements at community level.

The Working for Water programme can only work as a partnership. My department, which governs water affairs and forestry in South Africa, has been the lead agent in the development of the Working for Water programme. However, because the programme impacts on the core work of a number of other government Departments, at both national and provincial level, we have had to work in partnership.

At national level, our most significant relationships are with the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and of Agriculture. At provincial and local level, we work with and support a range of other agencies: provincial conservation authorities, water boards, local governments and others who often do the direct service provision.

In the case of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, we are optimising legislation and capacities and ensuring that our activities in both water and forestry support the development of sound and effective environmental management at all levels. They are responsible for putting in place the framework for managing biodiversity and

building strong and vibrant nature conservation institutions and we obviously seek to ensure that we support the approaches they are taking.

With the Department of Agriculture, we have worked on the revision of regulations in terms of legislation designed to conserve agricultural resources from degradation. We have developed a novel approach to the classification of invasive weeds which allows us, on the one hand, to deal with alien vegetation that has no value, and on the other hand, to have a pragmatic approach to weeds that may be useful in some circumstances but that may also be invasive. One element of this has been to ensure that the responsibility for land management (which is what alien vegetation control addresses) is placed correctly with those who own or are responsible for the management of the land.

It is partly for this reason that our partnerships have gone much wider than simply working with other government agencies. While privatisation has been a rallying cry for certain elements of the global community in recent years, we have a different approach. We recognise that in a developing country like our, the state has a crucial role to play in addressing poverty, ensuring equitable social development and promoting environmental sustainability. We believe that this remains appropriate even in developed countries, both within their boundaries and beyond - recognising that economic activities with huge social and environmental impacts transcend national boundaries.

It is important however to recognise that the private sector has both substantial responsibilities and a great deal to offer. Our objective has been to establish a framework within which these responsibilities can be exercised, their resources tapped.

Our relationship with our forestry industry provides a good example of this.

We have a small but vibrant forestry and forest products industry based almost exclusively on plantation forestry - some 105 million square hectares - whose locally developed expertise has been used to achieve a global reach including substantial investments in both USA and Europe. This industry has proved remarkably responsive to our domestic challenges. This is perhaps in part because of the global exposure to the importance of sustainability. It is just as much linked to the South African experience where there has been obvious potential for conflicts of interest to develop between the

forest industry, on the one hand, and those charged with nature conservation and alien plant control on the other

Early interaction was indeed confrontational. The local forest industry is after all based on the cultivation of species such as pine, wattle and hakea, which have clear invasive potential. Once the economic importance of the industry - a major contributor to rural development and to the broader national economy - was recognised by environmental interests and the need to control alien vegetation accepted by the foresters, a basis was established for working together.

The potential conflicts have thus largely been overcome through a common commitment to finding lasting solutions to the challenges posed by forestry and invasive alien plants. The private forest industry has formed a partnership with the Working for Water programme based on collaboration, integrity, and a shared vision to enhance (i) the control of invading alien species; (ii) the utilization of local communities in such activities; (iii) the sustainable management of the country's natural resources; and (iv) best management practices.

In terms of the agreement, the forest industry has seconded senior foresters to the Working for Water programme, to provide additional capacity for a range of tasks. In addition, the forest companies make various facilities or services available to Working for Water teams in the field. In return, the Working for Water programme has undertaken to fund the clearing of demarcated areas (including riparian zones planted with alien trees prior to the enactment of environmental regulations that now outlaw such plantings). It will also ensure that the forest industry's efforts with regard to managing invading alien plants are publicized, and it will work closely with industry to develop equitable legislation to govern the forest industry.

The partnership with forestry has impacted on other areas. Thus we are now linked with another forestry initiative (the Mondi Wetlands Trust) to protect, rehabilitate, and manage our precious wetland areas so that they can continue to deliver vital benefits to our communities.

Another area in which substantial partnerships have been developed has been around fire management. In January 2000, the Cape Peninsula experienced unprecedented hot and dry conditions that led to some of the worst fires on record in that area and many houses were destroyed. While fire is a natural phenomenon in the region's unique "fynbos" (fine leafed indigenous vegetation), the invasive alien plants greatly exacerbated the fires and their impacts.

It was clear that this kind of problem would best be addressed by a tailored approach, and partnerships were formed with the private sector to form the Santam/Cape Argus Ukuvuka: Operation Firestop campaign. The campaign, named after the Xhosa term imploring residents to "wake up", is co-sponsored by the City of Cape Town, the Santam insurance company, the Cape Argus (a local newspaper), the Nedbank Green Trust (linked to WWF-SA), Total (the petroleum company), the Peninsula Mountain Forum (a network of NGOs) as well as the Working for Water programme.

The campaign has three major aims: first, to control invading alien plants and to rehabilitate fire-damaged areas; second, to create employment and to protect vulnerable communities from fire; and third, to implement integrated fire management plans. The programme has provided a focal point for establishing partnerships in addressing a major environmental problem. Ukuvuka is just a start - my Department has responsibility for promoting an institutional framework for fire control in forest and rural areas and we intend to encourage similar partnerships across the country.

A different type of partnership has developed around dealing with crime. The problem of the rehabilitation of those imprisoned for crime is a worldwide phenomenon exacerbated by deep poverty. There is a need to re-absorb ex-offenders into communities once they are released, through finding them productive employment. The Working for Water programme, in partnership with the Department of Correctional Services and a leading non-Government Organisation, NICRO, has initially targeted over 600 of these people within a special programme. Through being able to participate in this programme, ex-offenders have discovered the dignity of meaningful employment, and are being re-absorbed into society. Without such initiatives, the cycle of crime and punishment remains self-perpetuating. In a small way, this initiative has demonstrated that the cycle can - and must - be broken.

To move back towards the core environmental issues, it should be clear that the focus of Working for Water - the control of invasive aliens - is pre-eminently about protecting biodiversity. Our country has ratified the Convention on Biodiversity, and in terms of this convention we are obliged to take steps to combat the threat of invasive organisms. One of our most important hotspots of biodiversity is to be found in the Cape Floral Kingdom, which spans the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces.

This is why we have recently seen the development of a comprehensive strategy to secure the future of the Cape Floral Kingdom. This strategy, dubbed the Cape Action Plan for the Environment, or CAPE, is the first such strategy to address the conservation of an entire Floral Kingdom on earth. We are justly proud of the strategy, which has brought all of the important government and private sector partners together for the first time to address this important common goal.

We certainly believe that the awareness that Working for Water, an active and ongoing partner in the CAPE initiative has created - the model of a social programme to achieve environmental objectives - has been an important contribution to the achievement of this success. The challenge we are now addressing is to consolidate success and make the transition from a stand-alone programme to one of integration by all landowners, conservation organisations, communities and government agencies, promoting a new culture of conservation.

Friends, We are clear that sustainable development cannot be achieved within the boundaries of one country.

The problem of invasive alien species, and the threats that they pose to ecosystems, is one of global proportions. The Working for Water programme has actively linked with partners internationally, to access and share relevant expertise and experience. We have strong links to the Global Invasive Species Programme, which boasts a membership of the world's leaders in this field. Through our staff and partners we have significant representation on the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group. The United States and Australia have both supported several collaborative initiatives, while the Dutch, Finnish, Norwegian and New Zealand governments have all funded some of our

projects, enabling us to address problems that we would otherwise not have been able to. Perhaps most substantially, the importance of conserving the Cape Floral Kingdom has also been recognised by the Global Environmental Facility, which recently funded the development of the CAPE strategy.

My thanks go to all of them as well as to WWF-SA who under CEO, Dr Ian Macdonald, funded the development of the strategy in the early stages of the Working for Water Programme and who continue to supplement the salary of Programme Leader Guy Preston. To both of them I would like to express my government's appreciation for their initiative, creativity and dogged hard work and dedication, to making this programme a national and international role model.

In concluding: First, let me say that to date, the Working for Water programme has contributed significantly to the conservation of South Africa's unique biodiversity, to the protection of agricultural resources and to water security in a semi-arid country.

From what I have presented to you, I think it is clear that its success has depended on working in partnership and supporting our partners to undertake the work that is required rather than trying to do everything ourselves.

Just as important, the programme has received the support it has from my Government because it ensured that environmental goals were not tackled in isolation but as an integral part of a broader strategy to achieve our social and economic goals.

Friends, As I mentioned earlier, September 11th has made it ever more clear that we live in an inter-dependent world. We are all responsible to ensure that this is recognised in all spheres of activity. Our forest industry learnt about the importance of sustainability in part through their exposure to the markets of Europe and USA. Were they to be excluded from those markets, by trade barriers or financial constraints, they would neither be able to bring the lessons home nor could they afford to act upon them. So the trade and finance environment is critical if we want to achieve sustainable development and address poverty. My Government will certainly be seeking to ensure that these considerations are at the forefront of deliberations at next year's Johannesburg Earth Summit on Sustainable Development.

In the struggle against apartheid, our trade unions had a powerful unifying call: "an injury to one is an injury to all." The horror of September 11th was an injury to all humanity. So too, in environmental terms, an injury to one is an injury to the whole world. To ensure that there is a sustainable future for life on our planet, we need to build partnerships between the rich nations of the world and the poor - as a safeguard against international terrorism and the range of

1. maladies that confront our planet
2. Create role-models; give credit to partners and be ready to take the blame for setbacks; communicate effectively; above all ensure the common people benefit.

To do so, we need to understand what characterises a successful partnership.

A true partnership is based on a relationship of equality and mutual respect. A true partnership is based on shared power. A true partnership is based on transfer of skills and knowledge. A true partnership is based on mutual and agreed on benefit. This is the lesson that must be learned and applied in practice.

In a small way, in a small programme in our little "world in one country" at the Southern tip of Africa, I hope we have helped to demonstrate that.

I look forward to seeing you all next September in Johannesburg. In the meantime go in peace and travel safely.