

Santam / Cape Argus UKUVUKA CAMPAIGN

Address by
Minister Ronnie Kasrils M.P.
Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Anniversary of the Fires Open Day
Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens
08h30 Monday 5 February 2001

1. Deputy Minister Mabudafhasi, MEC Herandien, MEC Adams, MEC Bester, Mayor Marais, sponsors, members of the Board, the Trust and the Steering Committees of the *Santam/Cape Argus Ukuvuka Campaign*, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.
2. It is just over a year now since the Ukuvuka fires swept across Table Mountain.
3. These fires galvanised a most remarkable response – the *Ukuvuka: Operation Firestop Campaign*. Let me start with the private sector:
 - R20m grant from Santam – thought to be the biggest private-sector grant to a specific conservation project in the history of South Africa.
 - R5,4m from the Cape Argus, together with outstanding editorial coverage.
 - R5m from Nedbank through the Green Trust.
 - R4m from Total (with a promise to consider a further R1m donation).
 - Legal, financial and advertising expertise from top specialist companies has been given free of charge.
4. The public sector, across all three spheres of government, and across party-political lines, has come together in an exemplary manner. Specific mention must be made of the City of Cape Town (UniCity), with its contribution of R30m over the four years that the Campaign will run.

5. The core of the funding to address the scourge of invading alien plants across the mountains has been through the South African National Parks – the R57.5m from the Global Environmental Facility, backed by our own *Working for Water* programme.
6. Together with the drive provided by the NGO movement, and a receptive public, the *Santam/Cape Argus Ukuvuka Campaign* has provided the basis for a four-year campaign to ensure that never again do we face the wrath of such alien-fuelled wild fires across our mountains again.
7. The inspirational manager of the campaign, Ms Sandra Fowkes, will give some details of the progress made to date. I would like to salute all involved, for this campaign has all the makings of a role-model initiative from which we can all learn.
8. I also want to make the point that we are still in the beginning stages of a four-year process, and we remain at risk until the four-year strategy has been completed. There is still a great deal to do before we are out of the woods (or the invasive “woods” are out of our mountain).
9. Special mention must be made of the plight of those living in informal settlements, which are so vulnerable to fires. The campaign has recognised the critical role it can play in alleviating their plight, and has gone beyond such settlements within the Table Mountain zone to adopt two settlements within the Cape Flats: Joe Slovo and Silver City. Many of us will have witnessed the devastation of the fire at Joe Slovo last year, and know that this component is as challenging as it is so sorely needed.
10. I am honoured to be able to officially launch one of the products of the campaign, the “Cape of Flames”. This book is on sale here, with all proceedings going to the campaign. It documents the Ukuvuka fires in a most eloquent and gripping manner, belying its having been put together within a matter of two months. Moreover, it sold over 8 000 copies within the first three weeks of hitting the shelves.
11. Central to the future success will be the aptness and application of legislation – and notably the National Veld and Forest Fires Act of 1998, and the new regulation under the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act of 1983.
12. Related to this is the fact that this event also provides us with the opportunity to launch the review that I commissioned of the Cape fires, as an objective analysis of the underlying, systemic problems, and how we should strengthen and improve our policies, laws and institutions to manage better our veldfire environment in future. Particular thanks should go to the United Kingdom’s DFID programme, which was so quick to support us in this work.

13. The report has emphasised that we do not need new policies and laws – we must do better with implementing all the excellent new instruments that we have developed since 1994. The key is to maintain this direction and leadership, and to build the linkages between different spheres of government, the private sector, and civil society, at all levels. We need to do this systematically.
14. The report contains a set of over 60 recommendations, many of which are already being worked upon – eg, we have a process of working with stakeholders to develop an effective set of guidelines and recommendations for the establishment and functioning of Fire Protection Associations. These FPAs will be facilitating institutions for local co-operation between landowners, communities and government for the prevention, control and management of veld and forest fires. We will have a working set of guidelines and regulations in time for gazetting by the end of March 2001, when the National Veld and Forest Fire Act will be amended and fully promulgated, for action.
15. Finally, this event is also an opportunity to formally release the study undertaken by the CSIR on the fires, with its telling comment that every single house that was burned in the fires was surrounded by invading alien plants.
16. Table Mountain, like so many parts of our country, is a fire-prone system that will burn periodically. These fires are part of the ecological functioning of these systems. What we need to ensure is that we manage the fires in such a way that they no longer threaten life, property and our natural systems in the way that the alien-fuelled fires of January 2000 did.
17. I salute all involved in driving the *Santam/Cape Argus Ukuvuka Campaign*. I smell victory, even if it is still three years off. END.