

**Opening Speech by Mr. Ronnie Kasrils, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa
at the
African Sanitation and Hygiene Conference (Africasan)**

29 July 2002 in Plenary Session 1

Ladies and gentleman, fellow Honourable Ministers from Africa and South Africa, Sir Richard Jolly and other dignitaries I would like to extend to you a very warm African welcome to Africasan - the first African Sanitation and Hygiene Conference ever to be held.

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Colleagues, the matters that bring us together today are of grave importance. It has been estimated that over one million children a year die from waterborne diseases. Diarrhoea kills the equivalent of a jumbo jet full of children every four hours. This makes it is the second biggest killer of children in the world. A lack of adequate sanitation facilities and unsafe hygiene behaviour contributes significantly to this situation and this requires our urgent attention.

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In Africa we are facing a water and sanitation crisis. It is estimated that one in three Africans do not have access to adequate water supply and sanitation facilities and almost half of the people on this continent suffer from water-related diseases. This problem is most acute in sub-saharan Africa where 40% of people do not have access to safe water supply. And part of the problem is that we are just not catching up fast enough, development and population growth are almost outstripping any dent made in the backlogs as you can see from the two graphs displayed behind me.

Not any one of us has the solution to this crisis – we all have a piece of the puzzle. This next four days is an opportunity to put together the pieces of this puzzle so that we can launch a concerted campaign to address the backlog of adequate sanitation and the need for safer hygiene behaviour.

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Meeting the commitment made at Bonn

During the International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn in December 2001 I made a commitment that South Africa would co-host a Conference on African

Sanitation, Health and Hygiene. This commitment was made in the spirit of the outcomes of the Bonn conference which reflected the following key concerns;

- to first meet the needs of the poor in terms of supporting livelihood by focussing on clean water, health and welfare, food security and reducing vulnerability to natural disaster and disease;
- to decentralise power and means to a local authority level;
- to create new partnerships to meet common goals;
- to encourage co-operative arrangements at a water basin –level; and
- to establish stronger, better performing governance arrangements.

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Africasan is taking forward all of these key issues in different ways, but particularly tackles the first – the need to work together to address the needs of the poor. This acknowledges the need to be motivated and active when taking on the enormous backlog of people worldwide who have no access to adequate sanitation facilities. Despite laudable achievements to meet these needs since the Rio Summit ten years ago, there still remains a tremendous international sanitation backlog of 2.4 billion people which is clearly unacceptable. In Africa alone, it is estimated that over 300 million people do not have access to safe water and the situation for sanitation is even worse.

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South African experience with water supply and sanitation delivery.

In South Africa our record for the delivery of water supply is impressive. In the first seven years of democratic government we provided seven million rural people with clean water and in doing so met the Millennium target of halving the backlog 14 years ahead of the deadline. We are now aiming to achieve full coverage by the year 2008 with another 7 million who will be reached by that year.

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However in sanitation our record is not as strong. For a number of years we have struggled with slow delivery because there was no single focus and no sanitation champion, with the division of attention spread over seven different government departments. In addition, we lacked a sound national strategy and a lack of capacity at local government level for effective delivery.

In 2000 we were given a serious wake-up call with a cholera crisis in the Province of Kwazulu Natal. This sudden crisis galvanised us into action. Our Cabinet appointed a national sanitation champion and a single ministry, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, which is now responsible for co-ordinating the shared activity of other relevant departments. We set about addressing the lack of capacity by building skills

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in the three levels of government, civil society and local communities. In addition to this we have dedicated substantial financial resources to investment in sanitation delivery

During the last financial year we built forty nine thousand toilets in the rural areas, according to the Ventilated Improved Pit latrine model (VIP), which was five times more toilets that we had built during the previous seven years. During this financial year, my department expects to spend approximately R124 million on sanitation programmes and to construct 55 000 toilets, serving approximately 434 000 people.

With this new drive we are aiming to address the entire sanitation backlog in South Africa by 2010. From the cholera wake-up call in Kwazulu Natal two years ago we have emerged with renewed vigour and the determination to tackle the sanitation challenge. We have also learned a valuable set of lessons which we will be sharing with you during the course of this conference.

As already mentioned, we recognised that no one Department or organisation can meet the challenges of sanitation and hygiene alone. This is why we have adopted a multi-sectoral approach which involves supporting the sector and co-ordinating our efforts with other government departments, in particular Health, Education, Housing, Public Works, Local Government and Environmental Affairs as well as civil society, the private sector and other relevant role players.

WASH

After the cholera outbreak in 2000 the World Health Organisation commended the management of cholera by the South African Department of Health in maintaining a low mortality rate but stressed the need to step up the provision of clean water and sanitation. Although we have committed ourselves to an accelerated programme of delivery, we have learned from experience that providing water and sanitation is not enough. Hygiene awareness and attitudinal changes are essential elements in preventing the spread of waterborne diseases.

It was for this reason that we launched the WSSCC-initiated WASH campaign in March this year. WASH aims to encourage positive changes in hygiene behaviour, and to link water, sanitation and hygiene. As we know the simple act of washing hands can reduce the incidence of waterborne diseases such as cholera and dysentery by at least 33 percent. The WASH programme is an important opportunity

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for us to spread this message across our country to schools, clinics and the population at large.

In South Africa we want to engage meaningfully with the private sector around WASH. In both Central America and Ghana there have been successful partnerships between the private sector soap producers and government in terms of promoting positive hygiene behaviour such as handwashing. These partnerships have been win-win. Government has had public health messages spread in new innovative ways and soap producers have learned more about their target markets.

I hereby issue a challenge to the private sector in South Africa to join us in WASH to fight against insidious diseases that are taking the lives of our children and that are preventable through such simple means. Together we can save thousands of lives and prevent debilitating illness. I urge the private sector to come forward so that we might find common ground in the fight against waterborne diseases.

Process of taking sanitation forward internationally

Africasan is part of a global process of building the profile of, and developing support for sanitation and hygiene. In Bonn, the international community, acknowledged the critical importance of good sanitation and hygiene to the well-being of people all over the world. We also acknowledged that insufficient attention had been given to this important priority up until now. It had been on the back burner for many years and was regarded as less important than water supply issues.

These acknowledgements, together with the Water Supply and Sanitation Council's Vision 21, its WASH campaign, and the second World Water Forum at The Hague have built international support for sanitation and hygiene. This support is essential to ensure that more resources and attention are directed towards addressing sanitation backlogs. The next major milestone on the path to adequate sanitation for all citizens of our planet is the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Africasan is a critical stepping stone for Africa to prepare for this event, which is just one month away.

WSSD and poverty eradication

The overall target of the World Summit on Sustainable Development is the Millennium Development Goal to halve poverty by 2015. A programme of action in several key areas including water and sanitation, health and education still needs to be agreed upon.

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It is virtually impossible to eradicate poverty and improve quality of life without adequate sanitation and hygiene. Unless these issues are addressed, our people will continue to be vulnerable to poor health and disease, our women and children in particular, and the continued indignity of poor sanitation facilities will undermine all our attempts to attack poverty. These messages about poverty and the dire need for basic services, especially sanitation, health and hygiene were clearly present on the agenda in Bali. Our efforts to ensure that this results in accelerated delivery continues. In Bali, we failed to get international agreement on our much needed target for improved global sanitation, with a small number of developed countries holding out and not agreeing with our motivation that a target is essential if we are to focus on the objectives and build up the necessary momentum to overcome the enormous backlog in sanitation in acceptable period of time. Our aim is to half the sanitation backlog in the world by the year 2015 and we must gather our forces and speak in a decisive and united voice at the WSSD in Johannesburg because with the logic is on our side and there is every possibility that we will succeed. But we must not simply wait for the Johannesburg Summit.

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Deleted: In South Africa we have committed ourselves to a programme to completely remove the sanitation backlog, which stood at 18 million last year, by the year 2010. But my department cannot meet this challenge alone. We have therefore adopted a multi-sectoral approach which involves co-ordinating our efforts with other government departments like the Health, Education and Environmental Affairs as well as civil society, the private sector and all other role players. It is only through working together towards the common cause that we can ensure all aspects are being addressed.

We must continue to urgently draw attention to these issues in the lead up to the World Summit for Sustainable Development. Africasan is a most important opportunity to continue to mobilise for additional resources to be allocated, to achieving our aims and addressing health and hygiene issues.

African Union, NEPAD and AMCOW

It is this spirit of togetherness, commitment and unity that has drawn us all together in the African Union and in NEPAD, and it is this spirit which is our best defence against poverty and our best weapon in our common fight for economic and social development in our societies.

In order to advance these aims in relation to the water services sector, the African Ministers Committee on Water, or AMCOW, will soon hold its second meeting next month at the WSSD with the view to strengthening intergovernmental co-operation to halt and reverse the water crisis and sanitation problems in Africa. The meeting will also ensure that the water and sanitation issues relevant to African development take centre stage at the World Summit.

Africasan will be an action conference

Just as the Summit we are hosting in Johannesburg next month will be more action oriented than the Rio Summit, Africasan is also not just another talk shop - it is a conference for action. Substantial resources have been ~~provided to bring all of us~~ together for the next four days and the onus is on everyone here to see that this is money well spent. These next four days should go down as a landmark event in the advancement of sanitation ~~and hygiene issues in Africa~~. It should mark the beginning of renewed efforts to overcome the backlogs on our continent.

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My Department is taking this initiative extremely seriously, and in this light has organised that the day after this conference is spent working through our new sanitation strategy with all the major sanitation, health and hygiene stakeholders from around the country. For us, this represents an important opportunity to immediately take action on the findings and outcomes of Africasan and ensure forward impetus.

Proudly South African

We are very proud to receive the delegates of Africasan to our country. We hope that you enjoy your stay. Before I open the conference I must proudly point out the beautiful conference bags that you received on your arrival here. These bags are hand-crafted by a group of rural Shangaan women who have turned their cultural heritage, artistic skill and flare into a sustainable livelihood. I would like to congratulate them on their remarkable work and encourage them in their endeavour of building a better quality of life for themselves and their children.

Appreciation for attendance

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my sincere and heartfelt appreciation to my colleagues, my fellow African and South African Ministers, for taking the time to attend this conference. The presence of my fellow South African Ministers represents the commitment that we have across sectors to improved sanitation and hygiene in South Africa. The presence of my African colleagues represents a wonderful opportunity to send out a clarion call for sanitation and hygiene issues that must be heard at the Johannesburg Summit.

I would also like to thank all of the other delegates who have made the effort to be here. It is an encouraging sight to see so many people determined to bring change to our continent and rid it of the scourge of poor sanitation and hygiene. This is a

significant step forward with regard to our continent's renaissance and the NEPAD project.

Closing

During these next four days let us not forget that Water is Life and Sanitation is Dignity.

The health and well-being of our people is a goal that binds us all together and it is in this spirit that we have come together for Africasan. I wish us a productive and inspiring time together and on this note I declare the first African Sanitation and Hygiene Conference open.

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