

Speech to Stockholm Water Symposium

Ronnie Kasrils, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa

Stockholm, August 2002.

TITLE: FORWARD TO JOHANNESBURG AND HYDRO-SOLIDARITY.

Ladies and Gentlemen, honored guests, fellow water people, it is a pleasure to be here with you in Stockholm to discuss the issue dear to our hearts – water. This annual gathering brings together people from all over the world to grapple with the challenges of managing, developing, protecting and conserving water; with the challenges of providing water to people; with the challenge of using water for peace, development and security; the challenges of how water contributes to sustainable development on our planet, this tiny blue sphere in the universe. That is quite a balancing act of competing water uses that must be managed without conflict. Mark Twain's famous reference "whiskey for drinking, water's for fighting" must be avoided – at least the latter reference.

Water, as it flows downhill through the landscapes, or as it seeps silently through underground, brings a number of benefits to a range of users. It waters the wide fields of commercial farmers; it nurtures the crops and stock of rural communities; it provides recreation for our children, our friends, our families; it supports our power generation, our mines, our industry, and the plants and animals that make up ecosystems; it slakes our thirst, keeps us clean, spiritual and quite simply alive.

Water gives life. The amount and nature of the available water determines the extent and nature of that life. The amount and nature of water available also determines where development can take place. It is the task of a government to care for this water, to seek its fair distribution, balance the competing usage, and to facilitate its wise use for, amongst

other things, social and economic development. Development is crucial to ensure that we can eradicate the scourge of poverty that stalks our planet.

Within a few short weeks people from all over the world will be congregating in Johannesburg, South Africa to discuss similar issues on a broader scale at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. These discussions will take place in an international context strongly influenced by September 11th.

The horrific events of 9/11 last year were not random acts of violence, or acts of simple religious fervor. They were events arising from a particular global context – a context of huge disparities in wealth and power, one in which power is wielded all too often without due regard for ethics and social justice; To quote from the top-selling song in the USA at present: "You'll be sorry you messed with the US of A, CUZ we'll put a boot up your ass. It's the American way". Well that's the sentiment of some – not all – Americans.

May I suggest that South Africans are perhaps particularly well equipped to understand these issues not only because of the apartheid struggle but because South Africa represents, in many ways, the world in one country. Inside our borders we still have a small, highly privileged group of people who dominate the economic scene. On the other hand, we have a large sector of the population who, until recently, were excluded from the political scene, and even now in our new democracy, given historic disadvantages, are in many ways excluded from the economic scene. Such disparities, which the South African government is working hard to remove, are not conducive to a stable society if left unaltered. Nor are such disparities fair or just.

Throughout the world, too many children go to bed hungry each night. Throughout the world too many children die each day of easily preventable diseases, many of them arising from lack of clean water, adequate sanitation and good hygiene practices. At the same time, throughout the world, the privileged live the good life with clean hot and cold running water, well stocked dinner tables, big houses, limousine's, international jet set travel and the best of medical science.

We South Africans do not believe that the poor will always be with us. Nor are we prepared to undermine our commitment to building a country and a world that is fair, just and dignified. We are convinced that there are ways of eradicating poverty, should we, as citizens not only of nations, but as citizens of the world, decide to do so.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development has a chance to put this task firmly on the international agenda. But it is not a task that will ever be fulfilled if we leave it only to governments and international organisations. It is a task that should consume each of us, every day.

But what is it that the World Summit can deliver, and, in particular, where does water fit into this picture?

There are three key issues that we, in South Africa, wish to see coming our of the WSSD in relation to water.

As is well-known the Millennium Development Goals have set a target for reducing by 50% the number of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. We are calling for a similar target for the provision of sanitation – to halve, by 2015, the number of people without access to adequate sanitation.

The reasons for this are simple, and shocking. Throughout the world 1,1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water. 2,4 Billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. Almost all of these are in developing countries. By allowing this to continue, the world is condoning the death of millions of children and adults each year from easily preventable diseases – over two million; in fact the equivalent of a Jumbo jet filled mainly with children crashing every four hours. By condoning this, the world is saying that it is acceptable for poor people to be weakened by diarrhea, by cholera; we are saying that it is acceptable for women to spend many hours every day searching for water in the terrain; by condoning this we are saying that it is acceptable for poor people to be condemned to a life of ill- health, of disease, and a life without dignity. But we must say that as a world community, if we have any sense of social justice and human compassion, we cannot tolerate this. We must say that the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation is one of the simplest and most effective steps to eradicating poverty that we can take.

And we can say that the target of both clean drinking water and adequate sanitation can be met. In South Africa, the combination of the correct assessment of the situation, political will and financial investment (Dr Klaus Töpfer's trio of requirements) have enabled the government to deliver water to over 9 million people in 7 years. And the outstanding seven million person backlog in access to water infrastructure will be eliminated within six years. After the shock of a major cholera outbreak at the end of 2000 we have also now put in place the resources required to ensure that all South Africans have access to acceptable

sanitation within ten years. And we have put in place a financial system that will ensure that services can be kept running, and that all people can afford access to at least a basic level of water supply as a human right.

What we are doing in South Africa can be replicated internationally. We are a middle-income country. Our GDP mirrors the world average as do the levels of inequality between rich and poor.

As a world water community we know how to do it. We know what it will cost. The challenge of implementation requires that the provision of water and sanitation be placed high on the agendas of developing and developed countries; and that more funding is put into this sector. But I state very clearly – we can deliver clean drinking water and adequate sanitation to the people of the world IF WE TRULY WANT TO, IF WE HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL TO DO SO.

When war breaks out, in Central Africa or Eastern Europe for example the world mobilises its resources to step in and restore peace. This is not without considerable cost to the countries that commit their resources to these peace-keeping processes. As a people, who are deeply committed to building a world based on peace and security, we South Africans fully support this approach. And yet we are saying: more people died each day from diseases due to lack of water and sanitation than have died in any of these conflicts. This is the worst war. The war in which the poor are allowed to die silently while the world stands by and watches. We are challenging the world community to respond to this war – let us mobilise our considerable resources to bring health and security to the poor of this world through the provision of basic water services and sanitation, and through hygiene education. We can win this war.

The international WASH programme of the Geneva based Water Service and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) , is a programme that we in South Africa have embraced, as enthusiastic partners. This programme envisages not only the provision of the water and sanitation facilities, but also the provision of hygiene education for all to ensure that the proper use of these facilities can maximise the health benefits accruing to communities. (WASH is the acronym for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene). The simple act of hand washing, after going to the toilet and before handling food reduces contagious disease by 40%.

Where though, are the extra finances to come from to ensure that everyone has access to clean water, adequate sanitation and the hygiene awareness programme? The answer is that there are a number of sources. Firstly, it is important for developing countries to show their political will by making internal resources available, where this is possible. South Africa, for example, has committed over \$100 million US, a year to meet this challenge. Secondly, increased international support is required, through aid and technical support as well as through the reform of trade, migration and investment arrangements which will enable developing countries to fund their own development.

The global target of aid as 0.7% of GDP in developed countries has by no means been reached as Dr Töpfer has so dramatically indicated - Indeed, in some countries aid levels are being reduced. So we are calling for all developed countries to meet the target of 0.7% of GDP to go into international aid rather than the 0.2% at present. And we are calling for this aid to be made available to developing countries through formal agreements, not simply through loose partnerships.

The terms of international trade remain a key challenge facing the world. A recent Oxfam report revealed that the subsidies paid to farmers in developed countries far outweigh the aid given to developing countries. These subsidies undermine the ability of developing countries to compete on the world agricultural market. For many developing countries agriculture is still the prime economic activity, and these subsidies are deeply hindering the ability of these economies to grow and flourish. You may say that this is an agricultural issue, not a water issue, but the two are interrelated. Water is a key input to successful agriculture. At the same time, a burgeoning economy allows greater protection and management of precious water resources. Thus, the international trade and investment issues are key to our ability to use water productively and to protect and manage our resources properly.

This brings us, however, to another international issue – the issue of corruption. All too often, when it comes to discussions regarding developing countries, corruption and mismanagement are terms that are quickly bandied about. And yet corruption cannot take place without someone who is willing to pay for the corruption- there must always be a corruptor and the corruptee as the saying goes it takes two to tango. The global community is calling for good governance, free, amongst other things, from corruption. And yet we must ask whether developed countries are willing to put their money where their mouths are. And I ask this because of our own recent experience in South Africa.

Over the past months, a corruption trial has been running in the tiny nation of Lesotho. After the uncovering of corruption on the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, the Lesotho government decided to take on not only the Lesotho official who had received bribes, but the companies that had bribed him as well. The official concerned has been found guilty and sentenced to a long jail term. Now legal action is being taken against the international

companies that bribed him. And yet, despite international outcries against corruption in developing countries, NOT ONE of the countries where these big companies are based has taken ANY, and I repeat ANY action against them. Nor has the World Bank, one of the funders of this project, taken any action against them. And so, we must ask, are the developed nations of this world truly committed to clean governance? Are they truly committed to eradicating corruption? Or are their protestations simply a smokescreen of words that allows, amongst other things, rampant profiteering to trample on the responsibilities and functions of government.

The state is not a fashionable agent in this post-industrial world in which we all live. More and more emphasis is placed on the role of the private sector. Some even tout the private sector as THE solution to the delivery of services to the poor. Yet the developed part of the world, which is pushing this position, is characterised by high levels of infrastructure investment that in most cases would not have occurred were it dependent on the whims of the market.

There is a danger accepting the same view of the state in the very different circumstances of nations which have not yet achieved an acceptably comfortable level of equilibrium. For example, on the eastern sea-board of South Africa, the Komati river basin could support much more economic activity (and even development, were we to manage it right) in Swaziland, Mozambique and South Africa. But the figures show that it could take around 45 years to reap a return on the initial investments needed to tap those waters. There are few private investors willing to wait for that sort of term to get a return. So we must depend on the states of the region to take the steps needed to harness un-exploited water resources. We will have to depend on the wisdom of governments to ensure that we build useful social and economic infrastructure.

Similarly, our drive to provide water services to the previously unserved poor in South Africa has drawn on the capacity of the private sector, but within a programme determined and driven by central government.

In short, we find that in our region where there is still so much to be done we cannot accept institutional prescriptions appropriate to developed countries where the role of the State in achieving a mature infrastructure has been played out. We have come to the conclusion, in water issues, that our challenge is to reinvent government, not abandon it. And increasingly, we are met by private sector realists who acknowledge that without public funds, we will not achieve our basic service goals in poor communities.

Let me end by emphasising our need to develop visions for water resource management that extend to entire regions. It is vital to achieve equity – and the prosperity that can flow from best management of a common resource. We should pool our intellectual energy to look towards total basin management, which can transcend national boundaries and ensure the use of water for the common good for all. To this end, we are proud that South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland have reached agreement on a water sharing agreement for the Incomaputo river basin, and we will be signing this agreement during the World Summit on Sustainable Development, a fine example of the splendid new term – hydro-solidarity – an illustration of water as a catalyst for co-operation.

We need to apply our intellectual energy to the even greater benefits that could flow from collaboration based on comparative regional advantage through trade in commodities.

In this year of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, water and our management of it is an appropriate metaphor for our development and our relations with one another. As

custodians of the water resources of our respective nations and regions, we must understand the relationship between government and water just as we understand the relationship between government and the common good.

In Southern Africa, we are trying hard to ensure that our management of water resources is a source of peace and development, both internally and with our neighbors, just as we would hope to see sustainable development leading to peace and democracy throughout the world.

In ending, let me return to the message of WASH, coming this time from one of the great leaders of our time, showing his commitment to the simple and yet profound act of washing his hands, and of the vital link between water, sanitation and hygiene. And may I end with the statement, **Water is life, Sanitation is dignity and long live Hydro-Solidarity!**

(Screening of the TV commercial: Nelson Mandela and South Africa's WASH Programme – 60 seconds)

(Ends).