

22 March 2002, Friday

10.30 – 10.45am

Keynote Address by Minister Kasrils, National Water Week 2002:

Official opening of the Inyaka Dam

Honourable guests – and members of my staff, community

It is a great honour for me to be with you here today to celebrate the official opening of the Inyaka Dam. This dam is once again a clear example of our government working to build a better life for all. We are determined to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment.

The legacy of apartheid is that millions of South Africans are still exposed to the possibility of ill health arising from the lack of clean water and inadequate sanitation. Men, women and children are still carrying water in buckets, jerry cans and plastic bottles to their houses. Your government is working very hard to improve the lives of all citizens. Despite the challenges we face, much has changed over the past seven years. We have brought clean drinking water to over 7 million people at a cost of R 4,5 billion. We are already providing 26 million people with access to Free Basic Water. This means that 66% of our people that have access to water infrastructure are benefiting from the programme.

Some years ago, my department realised that the resources of the Sabie River and the adjacent Sand River were not adequate to meet the expected domestic demand from the rural and peri-urban populations. We began investigating and planning ways to ensure enough water for all in the future. For years there have been serious water shortages in the area, and this placed a halt development initiatives in the area. In 1994, there were:

- an estimated half-a-million people in the Sabie River Catchment;

- 167 000 people in adjacent catchments; and
- about 11 650 ha of existing and planned irrigation as well as industrial mining initiatives dependent on this limited water resource.

There was also a pressing need to conserve the important riverine ecosystems, especially in the Sabie Sand Game Reserve and the Kruger National Park. Thus, my department together with a number of stakeholders, both international and local, began planning what is today the Inyaka Dam.

The dam has been built at a cost of R420 million. It assures the water supply to about 500 000 people in the Bushbuckridge area who were left without water supply when the rivers dried up during the 1992 drought. It has also ensured that 2000 hectares of irrigated land, which had been taken out of production due to water shortages will be brought back into use with obvious job creation benefits. This dam also now provides water for the environment in the downstream Kruger National Park and assures water for Mozambique.

Representatives from national and provincial governments from Mpumalanga and Northern Province (soon to be called Limpopo) played major roles; as did the traditional leaders of the area and the Inyaka Dam Project Steering Committee. This process saw a true integration of technical skills and social concerns being combined to produce a dam with related land for housing that:

- has a reservoir area comprising 120ha;
- has a gross storage capacity of 123 million cubic metres
- will eventually be able to transfer 25 million cubic metres per year across the watershed of the Sabie Sand sub-catchment.

We have invested considerable resources, as I have said R420 million, noting of course, that my department sees water and the development of human potential as inextricably linked. Throughout the implementation of this project, the positive impact on the people of this area has been high on the agenda, with the view to ensuring the optimal empowerment of the local community around the dam.

One remaining challenge now is to ensure that the water harnessed by this new dam is distributed to the people. My department will work tirelessly with the Water Board and Local Authorities to achieve this.

At this point, it is appropriate to recall why we celebrate National Water Week in South Africa each year. We do this because we realise that water plays a major role in eradicating poverty and underdevelopment in our country. In this year, National Water Week will be the forerunner of another important event, not only for us in South Africa, but all the poorer developing countries as well as the wealthy ones. I am, of course, talking about the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Very importantly, the World Summit will give us a platform to discuss how we will be addressing the issues of poverty eradication, inequalities and empowerment of the poorest of the poor, globally. We have to be able to grow our economy and use our resources, including water, in a way that will allow us and our children and their children to enjoy adequate benefits and quality of life. Government is saying to ensure a better future for all our people we must eradicate poverty and underdevelopment. But, we can only do this with your help – VUK'UZENZELE.

Too many of our people still live in poverty. Too many of our people still don't have access to water and adequate sanitation. Too many of them are dying because of this. I am saying this needs to stop. Together with you we can fight poverty.

During this week of celebrations, and in fact for the rest of the year, we will concentrate our efforts on the following:

- Providing water to improve food production, especially for emerging farmers
- Ensuring that we speed up the delivery of clean water and adequate sanitation facilities for those who don't have

- Continue with the provision of free basic water and
- Fight cholera.

These are vital issues that improve the quality of life of our people, especially those of you who suffered under apartheid. But, these are not stand-alone issues, only relevant to the water sector and our country. We have to put in place a unified, integrated approach as government, as the private sector and most importantly, as communities and citizens of this country. We must also approach the reduction of poverty with appropriate partnerships in Africa and the international arena. Clearly, our poor communities cannot achieve goals such as access to safe water without help. Thus, as a unified force, we need to create conditions in which communities and countries can provide for themselves. This is why the World Summit is so important, for each and everyone of us in South Africa. We have to assert that poverty must be tackled head-on globally. We must insist on economic growth, investment and improved access to international markets in order that we are able to help ourselves, to honour the call by President Mbeki that we must stand up as South Africans, and do things for ourselves.

Proudly, I can say that we have of the most progressive water legislation in the world, that we have of the best professional resources, and we have communities who have proudly resisted historical inequalities. Yet, this pride is balanced with the need to ensure that this excellence is served to the best interests of our country, especially to alleviate the plight of our impoverished women, men and children. Our challenge is to build a country together, in which all have access to water, in which water is used for the common good, and a South Africa, in which no-one should have to die of cholera ever again.

We have taken another step in this fight when we launched the WASH CAMPAIGN in South Africa, earlier this week. By having done, so we join the United Nations Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council in a global alliance to make safe water, sanitation and hygiene a reality for all people on earth. This campaign focuses on the simple act of washing hands after going

to the toilet, before handling food and before eating. Just washing hands has shown to reduce illness and death from water borne diseases by 40%. We all must join to popularise this campaign.

Let us remember what our President has said. He said that all South Africans have to stand up and lend a hand in creating a better life for all – VUK'UZENZELE. Let us use water for the common good, and in which no one should ever die of cholera again. Let us all work for a better South Africa.

Thank – you all for making National Water Week 2002 a meaningful campaign and ensuring its success. I now declare the Inyaka Dam officially open.

Amanzi ayimpilo!

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