

**NATIONAL WATER WEEK AND
THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Address by Ronnie Kasrils,
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South Africa**

**to the
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Good afternoon honourable guests, colleagues, members of the press

In a little more than five months, South Africa will be hosting the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

Our Government believes that sustainable development in South Africa can only be achieved through a focus on poverty eradication and economic development. This has been my guiding vision in my tenure as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry.

The view of the South African government is that WSSD is first about development rather than purely about the environment. At various preparatory meetings it has been emphasised that the three pillars of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental. Among the key issues that were highlighted are:

- Global partnerships to address inequality and poverty
- The integration of trade, investment and finance issues with the sustainable development agenda.

If development is about the quality of economic growth, sustainable development is about the quality of that development, about whether we are growing our economies and societies in a way that will enable our children and their children to enjoy adequate benefits. Thus, a better not worse quality of life than we have currently.

This is why South Africa with the rest of Africa has put poverty at the forefront of the sustainable development agenda. We understand that, for development to occur and be meaningful, we must attack poverty. If we can achieve a reduction in poverty, it will help us to achieve our development goals, one of which is to ensure that the development is sustainable.

Horrific global events, such as that of 11 September 2001, must underline for us all that poverty reduction is the way to deal with global inequalities that are the cause of hopelessness, feelings of helplessness, frustrations, turmoil and tensions that provide the breeding ground for extremism / terrorism. So the eradication of poverty and gross inequalities must be at the forefront of sustainable development.

We need to keep this perspective at the forefront as we prepare for the Summit in our individual sectors and I will be illustrating this with some reference from the water sector.

We have not sought to make water a stand alone issue for the conference. Rather, what we are doing is to use water to show how we need to approach development to ensure that it is effective and sustainable.

The key issues which I am promoting, in order to align the World Summit outcomes with the South African and African positions on of water and forestry are:

- The promotion of Integrated Water Resource and Forestry Management to achieve social and economic development

- Inclusion of the millennium target for provision of water supply and sanitation services
- The importance to plan for climate change in water and forestry resource management and the need to fund mitigating measures
- The programmes to promote bio-diversity should include the control over alien species to protect water resources
- Importance and need for funding for transboundary issues in water resource management to promote regional co-ordination should be stressed
- Wood resources should be accepted as an important source of energy for the poor.

So in a number of preparatory meetings, most recently at the International Freshwater Conference in Bonn in December, we started with the targets set by the Heads of State at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000.

In water they agreed that by the year 2015, the number of people in the world without access to basic water i.e. 1.2 billion people should be halved. At Bonn, we added that the same target should be applied to adequate sanitation, i.e. the number of people in the world without access to hygienic sanitation should be halved by then.

We have identified other areas in which we need to make progress on water - they include improving our management of rivers, both nationally and internationally, getting better systems in place to deal with natural disaster such as floods, cholera epidemics, droughts and so on.

What we have been emphasising is that the key to achieving our water goals is to improve the international environment in which we work. What do we mean by this? Developing country farmers cannot invest in more efficient water use if they cannot sell their products to world markets because of trade barriers. Industries cannot invest in water purification works if they cannot access the technologies they need.

The poor cannot pay the cost of basic drinking water supplies if they are unemployed because, in a global world, investment and jobs have gone elsewhere.

So we are saying that the Millennium Summit targets can only be achieved in the poorer countries if a new global framework is put in place.

Clearly, as things stand, the poorest of the poor cannot achieve goals such as access to safe water without help. But in the spirit of NEPAD, the New Partnership for African Development, rather than simply hold out begging bowls for more aid, we need to create the conditions in which communities and countries are able to provide for themselves.

That requires economic growth, it requires investment, it requires access for poor countries to international markets. This means that processes such as the World Trade Organisation and Finance for Development negotiations need to be linked to the Summit on Sustainable Development.

This is why we are calling for a “global deal”. We want to suggest that if we are to make progress in protecting the environment, we must agree to take global action to tackle poverty, which we all know is the worst threat to the environment and sustainable development.

This raises a critical issue – that of putting global environmental governance high on the Summit agenda. We will need more effective international governance of matters such as sustainable development. It is very difficult for developing countries to participate effectively in the many detailed protocols. Simply to fund and brief the delegations required to attend to the multitude of meetings is often a major challenge and beyond the means of many countries. Yet, as we know from the POPs process, the review of so-called “persistent organic pollutants”, if we fail to participate, we may find that we cannot afford insecticides to fight malaria because the cheap ones have been outlawed.

We need a system, which is designed to facilitate our participation in international governance, in environmental and sustainable development as in other areas. That might require some reforms on our side. One requirement might well be to improve our ability to act as regions rather than as single countries. That is why we are aligning ourselves with SADC, Africa, China and the G77 to have a stronger voice in these global debates.

Having outlined the big picture of our approach to the Summit, I would like to ask your indulgence to take advantage of my final few minutes to raise a subject which is dear to my heart and I am sure to yours, that of sanitation.

Effective sanitation is, as we know, a key to breaking the chain of transmission of cholera and many other diseases. Yet it always takes second place to water supply.

We would like to change this approach at the Summit. You must understand the interconnection between lack of clean, safe water and inadequate sanitation to illness and disease. Over one million children a year die from water born diseases - that is 6000 everyday - equivalent to six Jumbo jets full of children crashing everyday. Double the number that died in the New York atrocity of 11 September. Any student of history is aware that the way 19th century Europe dealt with its cholera outbreaks, was by the provision of clean water and sanitation. It was this (rather than medicine), that was responsible for the dramatic decrease in rates of death. But the third element of this revolution in health was the widespread introduction of hygiene education, starting with schools but embracing entire populations. A programme that comprises these three key elements is vital to ensure a better and sustainable quality of life for the world's population.

The first step in this project has been to have the Bonn Conference to recommend that a sanitation target should be added to the water supply targets of the Millennium

Declaration. The target that we agreed to is that the number of people in the world without access to hygienic sanitation facilities should be halved by the year 2015.

The second challenge is to ensure that there is a truly global campaign to promote sanitation improvement. The third challenge is to ensure that we spread the message that improved water supply and sanitation without improved hygiene practices will not achieve our goals.

Also we want to mobilise the leaders of the world to promote a healthy environment which we have to create. We need to focus equally on health and hygiene education as the third (but not last) element of the holy trinity of water supply and toilet provision.

Although there was general acceptance for our approach at the Freshwater Conference in Bonn, we must now work together with our partners in Africa and the South, to have these principles accepted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

To this end, we have launched the WASH CAMPAIGN (water, sanitation and hygiene for all) in South Africa during National Water Week. Thus, we have joined the United Nations Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council in a global alliance for making safe water, sanitation and hygiene a reality for all people on earth. We also see the WASH campaign as a mechanism to promote our sanitation proposals for the World Summit.

The WASH campaign of the UN mandated Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council – focuses on the simple act of washing hands after going to the toilet - before eating or handling food - reduces illness and death from water borne disease by 40% alone. So we must popularise the WASH campaign.

In the absence of basic services, cholera and similar diseases will always be a threat, compounded by a lack of health and hygiene education. This is why we regard water, sanitation and hygiene as entry points for poverty alleviation and why health education

in partnership with my colleague the Minister of Health is an integral part of our sanitation programmes.

During this financial year, my department expects to spend approximately R124 million on sanitation programmes, with 55000 toilets constructed, serving approximately 434 000 people. Construction is increasingly by the communities and households concerned, creating in the current year 8875 employment opportunities of which 2516 have been for women.

My aim is to ensure that the budget allocation for sanitation programmes increases steadily over the coming years, without prejudice to the pace of progress in water supply.

This brings me to the issue of cholera, on which our minds are currently focused, because of the cholera outbreak in our KwaZulu-Natal province and now lately, cases have been reported in the Eastern Cape too. The outbreak in KwaZulu Natal last year was a wake up call to us all. Effective sanitation is one key to breaking the chain of transmission of cholera and many other diseases. Our cholera prevention campaign will continue to target communities at risk with support and education ,emphasising the three barriers to water-borne diseases : safe water, sanitation and hygiene awareness.

In response to the recent outbreak of cholera in Ladysmith and surrounding areas an additional amount of R25 million was allocated for the provision of emergency water services infrastructure. This is in addition to funds made available by the Departments of Health and Local Government themselves for hygiene education, temporary water tanker services and the provision of bleach for household disinfection of water.

R81 million has already been channelled to District Municipalities since August 2000, additional to the R300 million annual allocation to KwaZulu -Natal for water services projects. Since the outbreak in Mqanduli near Umtata, my department has been working closely with Provincial Departments of Health, Education and the OR Tambo District

Municipality in a programme of hygiene education, environmental water sampling on rivers/streams/springs, and the construction of 300 emergency VIP toilets. Further assistance through the purchase of bleach and the provision of vehicles for health and hygiene awareness training is being considered. The department's regional office has reallocated a further R5 million for cholera prevention in the area.

Nevertheless, we should warn that, while there continues to be poverty in our land, we will continue to see outbreaks of cholera. We expect the current outbreak to rumble on until the end of summer and probably, on past experience, to resurge again next year although we hope at a much lower level.

This brings us to the issue of our Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme. My colleague the Minister of Health is my great ally in this anti-poverty programme; she never fails to emphasise the importance of clean water - and safe sanitation - for improving the health of our people. For our people, water is a high priority although happily each year, fewer and fewer people remain deprived.

The programme continues to make inroads into the backlog of 14 million inherited by Government in 1994. My department has provided access to clean safe water for approximately 7,068 million people in rural areas at a cost of R4,5 billion - this in addition to the major strides made by local government and housing in meeting the needs of our rapidly growing cities and towns.

At the Johannesburg Summit, we will be focusing on the key targets set by the Heads of State at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations in 2000. They declared that by 2015 the number of the world's population who at present do not have access to basic water must be reduced by 50%.

In this context, South Africa has performed remarkably well. We have in fact halved our unserved population in just seven years and are on target to wipe out the entire backlog by 2008 if we maintain our current rate of progress.

Co-ordination with local government has been dramatically improved. This year 90% of rural projects will have been identified and prioritised in the Integrated Development Planning process. This is part of our effort to ensure that once built, the projects continue to function effectively. For us, sustainable development is just as much about water supplies which continue to work as an environment that continues to be protected.

In the coming financial year we have allocated an amount of R1,215 billion for the programme - including sanitation. By the end of this financial year we will have reached over 1 million people who previously had no access to safe clean water, at a cost of R 841 million, the water supply component of this year's overall R1,12 billion for water services programmes.

Since 1994, in the Eastern Cape 1,3 million people have been served; in KwaZulu-Natal 1,6 million; and in North West 1,3 million. 931 000 people have benefited in Northern Province, 612 000 in the Free State, 922 000 in Mpumalanga, 190 000 in Northern Cape and 136 000 in the Western Cape.

It is no use providing water infrastructure if people cannot afford to access it. This point has been recognised internationally and, at the Bonn Freshwater Conference in December last year, it was accepted as a policy. Here, at home, the Free Basic Water programme is turning theory into practice in our fight to eradicate poverty. I am pleased to say that already 66% of the total population in the country who have access to water infrastructure are benefiting from the policy. 26 million people have access to 6000 litres of free water per household per month.

Implementation is not without obstacles. Obviously, the 7 million people without infrastructure cannot benefit until supplies are provided, we hope by the latest in 2008. Certain municipalities are still struggling to set up the physical and accounting systems to implement free basic water. My department is providing technical support to help them.

While the provision of basic services is a vital contribution to poverty alleviation, it is equally important to ensure that we can meet the water needs of the growing economy which provides our people with jobs and incomes. A key challenge to be addressed at the Johannesburg Summit will be the sustainable use of natural resources - such as water - to meet the needs of the world's growing population without causing irretrievable damage to the environment.

One step to ensure that we live within our water means will be the publication later this year of the draft National Water Resource Strategy. This will provide the national framework within which South Africa's water resources will be protected, used, developed, conserved, managed and controlled. It will indicate, for instance, where water is available for development and for additional irrigation. It will identify where new investment will be needed to meet domestic and municipal needs as well as where difficult choices have to be made - between power stations and new mines for example. It will provide the basis for achieving fair arrangements with neighbours who share our rivers.

The strategy will also outline the financial and institutional strategies to be adopted and outline a timetable for completing the restructuring of the water management institutions already initiated in terms of the 1997 national water policy.

The strategy will describe provisions for: water resource protection, water use and how it would be authorised, water conservation and demand management, water pricing, the institutional arrangements for water resource management, infrastructure development, monitoring and information systems and public safety in water matters.

The National Water Resources Strategy will also set the scene for the important negotiations with our neighbouring states with whom we are sharing water resources, i.e. the Orange River, the Limpopo River, the Incomati River and the Pongola River.

This information will be given in the context of the present and future status of our water resources in terms of availability and requirements. Measures will be proposed by which a sustainable balance between water availability and requirements for water may be achieved in the long term.

Co-operation among all spheres of Government is essential for the success of water resource management. The strategy will take account of the policies and laws of other Government departments, but we will have to ensure that all spheres of government are aware of the implications for them.

Because so many sectors of society are affected, there will be a substantial process of consultation before the strategy is finally adopted to guide the plans of action of the Department.

Thank you honourable guests.

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