

18 March 2002, Monday

10.00 – 10.15am

Keynote Address by Minister Kasrils: Launch of National Water Week 2002, Ladysmith, KZN

Honourable guests – Minister Tshabalala-Msimang, Deputy-Minister Rev Zondi, Amakhosi, Mr Gorrinsankar Ghosh (UN), Eskom, MEC (Health) Dr Zweli Mkhize, South African Breweries, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address you at the launch of National Water Week 2002, and to be hosted by the community of Ladysmith.

Our government is working very hard to improve the lives of all citizens. 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. Here in KwaZulu – Natal we have provided 1,6 million people with water.

We are moving ahead in addressing the issue of sanitation. Government has adopted a national implementation strategy to deal with the backlog by 2010. I am committed to increasing our spending in providing sanitation over the next few years. 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.

Every year we celebrate National Water Week in South Africa. 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 by ensuring 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 as we are gathered here in Ladysmith. 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.

Today, we take another step in this fight when we launch the WASH CAMPAIGN in South Africa. By doing 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.

Today, I am also proud to announce that South African Breweries has joined our fight in creating a better life for all by supporting my call to the business sector to provide funding for the installation of roundabout play pumps in our communities. This roundabout playpump harnesses the energy of our children at play to pump and supply clean borehole water to tanks. Now our women and children don't have to walk long distances to fetch water. South African Breweries have donated R 2 million for this project. I want to say thank you to them. Today, I will be handing over the first of many of these pumps funded

by SAB. Let's hope their example will ensure that other companies in the private sector will take up the challenge.

As I declare National Water Week 2002 open, 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 let's build a country in which no one will ever die of cholera again. Let us all work for a better South Africa.

Thank you honourable guests: Minister Tshabalala-Msimang, Mr Gorrie Ghosh, Amakhosi, Councillors. A special thank you to our corporate sponsors, especially Eskom, Sappi.

Amanzi ayimpilo!