

SOUTH AFRICA'S APPROACH TO THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Address by Ronnie Kasrils,
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**to the
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Health And Sustainable Development**

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Let me begin by affirming the view of the SA government is that WSSD is first about development rather than purely / specifically about environment. As our Minister of Environment and Tourism has emphasised, at various preparatory meetings that the three pillars of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental. Among the key issues that he has 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 and better not worse quality of life than we do.

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 that will help us to achieve our development goals, one of which is to ensure that the development is sustainable.

Horrific events of 11 September 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 since that is what I know best and it is one in which you as health ministers, have a deep interest.

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.

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 within 15 years, the number of people 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. 2.5 billion deficit or backlog - a point to which I will return)

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 dealing with these things does not lie in the water sector. The key to achieving our water goals is to improve the international environment in which we work.

So 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, what we are saying is that 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.

We believe that the challenge for the health sector is to look at the sustainable development debate in the same way. We cannot have a world summit at which we all advocate our sectoral goals outside of a broad strategy.

We also need to be clear about the challenges of managing in an international context. So another issue which we are putting high on the Summit agenda is global environmental governance.

We are saying that we will need more effective international governance of matters such as sustainable development. We all know that 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 environment 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. This is why today’s meeting is so important, bringing us together as Southern African partners, demonstrating that we are building our regional governance to ensure that we can, as a region, participate effectively in new systems of global governance.

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.

Our minds are currently focused on this because of the cholera outbreak in our KwaZulu-Natal province. 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 and I cannot think of better partners and advocates than you Health Ministers and experts. Excellencies, you know better than anyone 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 - let alone medical student - 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 populous.

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

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 get the message across that improved water supply and sanitation without improved hygiene practices will not achieve our goals.

The message we want to get across to the leaders of the world is that to take advantage of the healthy environment which we aim 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. 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.

I hope I can count on you for support in that effort and, on behalf of Minister Valli Moosa, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, I wish you well for the rest of your deliberations.

Thank you and looking forward to seeing you all here in Sandton, Johannesburg in seven months time.