

**21 March 2002, Thursday**

**10.30 – 10.45am**

**Keynote Address by Minister Kasrils: Launch of National Water Week 2002, Eastern Cape**

Honourable guests

It is a great honour for me to address you at the launch of National Water Week 2002, on this the 21 March, Human Rights day. As I speak with you, millions of South Africans are exposed to the possibility of ill-health arising from the lack of clean water. In the Magisterial area of Mqanduli, communities are currently dealing with the devastating effects of cholera, with the number of cases reported being well over 400. The affected areas lie on the banks of the Umtata River. Communities are collecting water from here and the nearby Qhingqolo River, thereby placing themselves at high risk of contracting water-borne diseases.

Nationally, our Government is 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. These are important reminders of our past, especially today when we remember the thousands of fallen heroes who fought for our democracy, and as we look to guide our future heroes to ensure that they have a healthy living environment.

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. In this area alone, my department is ensuring that 300 emergency toilets will be set-up; and additional R5 million will be provided to assist the District Municipality with intervention measures for the provision of water. We are working closely with the Joint Operations Committee to ensure that a number of other measures are put in place such as education and awareness projects.

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. Here, in the Eastern Cape, an additional R12 million has been made available to accelerate the delivery on sanitation and to address the cholera crisis.

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. In the Eastern Cape, 36% of the population is being served with free basic water. 24 of the 43 municipalities have a firm policy in place to deal with Free Basic Water.

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 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.

**Amanzi ayimpilo!**