

**28<sup>th</sup> WEDC INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE – KOLKATA  
(CALCUTA), INDIA**

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**OPENING STATEMENT – RONNIE KASRILS MP,  
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Koffi Anan has stated: “We have the capacity and the means, what is needed is the political will.” Who would disagree with this statement if we are to overcome global inequality, poverty and pollution, ignorance and disease.

The world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century clearly has the technology, the resources and the ability if only these can be applied in a wise equitable and sustainable way. What is required is the commitment of the nations and role players, operating in a purposeful partnership, to overcome what South Africa’s President, Thabo Mbeki termed

global apartheid at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg last September.

The stark statistics so often published demonstrate how crucial it is to narrow the divide between the rich and poor, the developed and developing nations, the haves and have-nots.

The WSSD took significant decisions to take us forward, not in everything to be sure, but a great deal was achieved. Water and Sanitation was not only high on the agenda but a breakthrough was achieved with Sanitation, so long an area of neglect, at long last in the spotlight it deserves.

The challenge now is resources and implementation. To achieve the targets of halving over a billion people in the world without clean water and the 2.4 billion without adequate sanitation by the year 2015 is going to take a Herculean sustained effort. It can and must be done. We must build on the partnerships and practices that helped bring about the radical advance in thinking and decision making achieved in Johannesburg. Working together with a common vision,

with the necessary leadership and the successful strategies and appropriate technology put into practice in various ways and in a growing number of countries, and learning from one another we must build on the success stories – for as the saying goes, “success breeds success”.

The WSSD motto was “People, Planet, Prosperity”. To this we must add the P for Partnership. Partnership between states, international agencies, the private sector, civil society in the form of NGO’s and CBO’s, the practitioners and the professionals, scientists and engineers, above all the people at the grass roots with whom we must consult, involve and empower. We must never make the mistake of viewing people at the community level as passive objects of our endeavors but rather as active role players. And given global inequalities between the North and the South let us strengthen the South-to-South ties – as for instance India and South Africa are doing, and South Africa is advancing through NEPAD and the African Renaissance.

Time does not allow much expansion at this point of our agenda and I will deal with the significant progress South Africa has made in clean water and sanitation delivery in another session, including our dynamic partnership with the Geneva based Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and the importance of the WASH campaign they have initiated and we, in common with some other countries, have launched. The WASH synergy of Water – Sanitation – and Hygiene, spells out the formula many of us are now championing as the road map to follow. One partner I have not mentioned and must include is the Fourth Estate, the media through which we communicate to the public at large and even ourselves.

Given the debate around “Water as a right or commodity”, and the role of the state and private sector I would like to state upfront: In South Africa our Constitution acknowledges access to water as a human right. Since South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994 our government has been engaged in a massive programme to ensure that all our people receive clean, potable water, We will reach that target by the year 2008. Of a population of 42 million there are six million still to be reached.

At present 27 million people live in municipalities providing in terms of national policy a basic minimum of 6KL free water per month. Consumption above that is paid for through a stepped tariff or in the case of poor municipalities central government grants or subsidies.

But to collect, store, purify, deliver water and treat it after its use is costly and there simply must be a commitment to cost recovery otherwise government and municipalities will be bankrupt and there will be no service whatsoever, whether for the poor or the rich.

In developing countries the state has a major role to play which cannot be diminished. But given limited resources we believe the private sector does have a useful role, in mobilizing much needed capital investment and providing management expertise and efficiencies subject to conditions and regulations.

Consequently there are a limited number of cases – 5 out of 284 local municipalities – where agreements exist with the private sector. We do not see this as privatisation of water that is selling off water

resource but as a contractual service for a specified period which must be regulated with protection for the consumer.

It is not a question of the state or the private sector that should be the issue but whether the consumer is receiving an effective, sustainable service. That must be the ultimate test.

I wish you a successful 28<sup>th</sup> WEDC Conference and look forward to fruitful results from this august conference.