

**SPEECH BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER
AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE NATIONAL ARBOR WEEK 2003 -
IVIKI LEZIHLEHLA LAUNCH, TOTAL SOUTH AFRICA CHANDUKANE
PHAPHAMANG COMMUNITY PARK, EVATON TOWNSHIP, EMFULENI
MUNICIPALITY ON THURSDAY, 28 AUGUST 2003**

Ladies and gentlemen, friends

I am delighted to join the community of Emfuleni (Evaton Township) to celebrate Arbor week today. This community has recognised the importance of planting trees to improve the quality of our lives and I would like to commend all those involved in the greening project that we are launching today.

A few years ago Arbor Day was expanded to National Arbor Week - Iviki Lezihlehlala. This was done in order to do justice to the important issues that we need to address during this time. During Arbor Week we draw the nation's attention to the value of trees and the different roles that they play in our lives.

The theme for Arbor Week 2003 is “Trees are our Heritage - Mehlare ke Bohwa bja rena”. Under this theme we are highlighting four areas in which we need South Africans to participate.

Protect our indigenous forests

Only half of one percent of South Africa's land is covered by indigenous forests. These forests are a rare and important resource. They provide homes for animals, trees, plants, insects and birds. They are also very important to rural communities because they provide medicinal plants, building materials and fuel.

Help us to prevent veld and forest fires

Forests, particularly plantations, provide jobs and economic opportunities for many of our people in rural areas. The plantations serve important industries including sawmilling, pulp and paper and housing. The economic benefits of these trees are, however, threatened by fires. Wild fires also affect other kinds of agriculture and land use. For the sake of our forests and all our rural areas I call on all South Africans to help us to prevent veld and forest fires.

Plant a tree of Remembrance

Throughout history people have planted trees in memory of their loved ones. Trees can serve as a living memory to people who have made a valuable contribution to our society. I would like to ask you to continue with the enthusiastic support that was given during last year's trees for remembrance campaign.

Green our homes

Trees in our cities, towns and settlements help to make our homes shady, green and dignified. This is the importance of Urban Greening. The quality of our lives is improved through clean air, noise reduction, storm water control and beautification of our surroundings. Some parts of South Africa, especially formerly white areas are leafy and green. Others, especially townships and informal settlements are often bare. This mirrors life in South Africa, where as a result of apartheid, there have been great disparities of wealth, income and opportunities between black and white. In the same way, trees have been more prevalent in the formally privilege areas than in the townships and even rural settlements. We need to turn this situation around because trees are colour blind and should be enjoyed by all our people. You can help by planting trees at schools, churches, in

the street and at home. You can also work with your local authority to promote tree planting campaigns.

Whilst we advocate planting of our beautiful indigenous trees, I also would like to make reference to exotics such as the Jacaranda, which have contributed, to the beauty and even distinctiveness of cities such as Pretoria and Johannesburg.

The idea of banishing the Jacaranda entirely in the future has upset many of our people and I sympathise with their feelings.

Since we cultivate alien trees such as the Eucalyptus and Pine under controlled conditions in industrial plantations, I have wondered why on earth then can we not preserve the lovely Jacaranda under controlled conditions in the Urban areas.

At present the Jacaranda is listed under the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA) as a prohibited tree and therefore municipalities such as Pretoria cannot replant them once their life expectancy has run out.

I have posed to the Minister of Agriculture that we list the Jacaranda under category 2 of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA),

which would mean it could be maintained in a similar way as our industrial plantations but within the boundaries of our cities.

In addition research is being developed, and government provided funding for this research, to develop an infertile seed, so that Jacarandas would not be able to propagate themselves. The Minister of Agriculture has indicated to me her interest in such an approach. We will be examining this possibility and I look forward to being able to make a statement together with her in the near future with the hope that we both will be saying “long live the Jacaranda, long live the beauty of Urban Greening!”

The importance of today's event

This important event, which is the national launch of Arbor Week is focusing on Urban Greening. The purpose is to encourage all communities to participate in greening our towns and cities.

Various organisations within the community, for instance Phapahamang Environmental Youth Group here in Evaton Township and non-governmental organisations like Trees For Africa, are working together with my Department to promote the idea of greening the townships. We commend them for their hard work and dedication.

We know that people in green surroundings feel much more satisfied, more relaxed and is healthier than in concrete jungles. The crime rate also tends to decrease in such institutions. Urban Greening is an activity to be carried forward not only by Government and non-governmental organisations, by also by members of the community.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry encourages partnership between government, non-governmental organisations, communities and the private sector. The launching of Total South Africa Chandukane Phaphamang Community Park serves as good example of how National Government, local government, non-governmental organisations and community organisations can work together to achieve a common goal like greening our environment. This should not be the first and last project of this nature within the boundaries of the District Municipality, but should serve as a lesson for the partnership for the areas of Sedibeng Municipality.

Master of ceremonies, distinguished guests, I would like to thank you all for your time and commitment in promoting the greening of our country. My special thanks go to the Arbor Week organisers including the staff of my Department, Trees and Food for Africa, Phapahamang Environmental Youth Group and the corporate sponsor for Arbor Week, TOTAL South Africa. We also thank the community of Evaton Township, the Emfuleni

Municipality, and other sponsors and organisations for their tireless efforts and contributions to make this event successful.

I thank you