OPENING ADDRESS BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON "WATER, POVERTY, AND PRODUCTIVE USES OF WATER AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL" ON TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2003 AT MISTY HILLS COUNTRY HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, MULDERSDRIFT

It is a pleasure to be here to open this important international symposium – a symposium that is dealing with a matter very close to my heart and to the heart of Government.

The South African Government is committed to the eradication of poverty, and the building of a society based on justice and human rights. Our Constitution, which is a profound and far reaching document, gives us clear direction on the nature of the society we are trying to build. However, the legacy of the apartheid state means that, despite our best efforts since 1994, we still have a long way to go in this regard. The recent cholera problem in the Eastern Cape is an example of the challenges that we are facing. Cholera is, primarily, a disease of poverty. Lack of clean water, lack of sanitation facilities, poor hygiene practices all contribute to the spread of cholera. The rate of fatalities, however, is aggravated by poor nutrition and already vulnerable communities. Those without adequate food supplies are more vulnerable to cholera than those who are well fed and healthy.

Across the world, millions of people still live in poverty. Millions of people live without access to clean drinking water, without adequate sanitation, without sufficient food, without decent housing. The World Summit on Sustainable Development recognised, in September last year, that the eradication of poverty is a key element of sustainable development. Throughout the world, governments have committed themselves to

sustainable development – last year's World Summit tied this process, inexorably, to the eradication of poverty.

And yet, the eradication of poverty is not an easy task. It requires us to be active on a number of fronts. It requires action by governments, by citizens, by researchers and by activists. It requires actions at the international level, at the national level and at the local level. If we believe in social justice, it is the most important activity that any of us can undertake.

As Franklin Roosevelt once said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little." And water is a key part of this equation.

Since 1994, the Government has placed considerable emphasis on the delivery of clean water to the people of South Africa. My Department alone has delivered clean water to over eight million rural people. The lives of those people, and of the women in particular, have been enhanced by this access to water. Yet many challenges still remain, for instance we are only beginning to deal with the enormous sanitation backlog now. Provision of housing, of education, of adequate health care, all remain a challenge. So does the challenge of feeding hungry bellies. The Government has identified that food security is a major issue that we have to address – too many South Africans still go to bed hungry. Children that are hungry cannot learn properly in school. People who are not fed properly are more vulnerable to cholera, to HIV/AIDS, to a range of illnesses. People who are hungry cannot live the life of dignity to which they are entitled. It is not for nothing that our Constitution guarantees access to sufficient food as a human right.

It is self evident that water plays a key role in dealing with food security – both at the macro level, and at the micro, or household level. At the macro level, particularly in

water scarce countries, the challenge is how to use precious water most effectively for the production of crops. This is an area where many governments, including my own, have considerable experience and expertise.

At the household level, the challenge is more subtle, and perhaps less well understood. The provision of drinking water only deals with one aspect of the water need of poor households. Poor people in particular also require water for food gardening, for small businesses, for productive purposes. Thus, people, especially the poor and poor women in particular, draw multiple benefits from having access to water. The combination of the domestic and productive benefits can add up to an appreciable impact on livelihoods and poverty eradication.

Thus, when we consider water at the household level, we need to look more broadly than simply at the need for clean drinking water. Water is crucial for the very productive activities that help people grow food, make money, and thus escape poverty. Ultimately, poor households require access to water for both domestic and productive purposes – this, however, poses significant challenges in terms of the delivery of water for productive purposes to the poor. In South Africa we find ourselves facing such challenge and are grappling with the questions, as the symposium is, as how to meet the challenge.

Our poor people will tend to use domestic water supply for productive purposes – and this is natural - sometimes placing excess strain on systems designed for providing water for drinking purposes only. On the other side of the coin, the irrigation, industrial, and water resources sectors sometimes ignore poor people's domestic and productive needs. As increasingly recognized, the remedy is equitable targeting of appropriate infrastructure to many poor producers.

Water development for productive purposes, with support to render the water-dependent enterprise profitable, opens up new opportunities for sustainable financing of such infrastructure by the poor. "Smart" subsidies or cross-subsidies could stimulate such pro-poor infrastructure development and institution-building processes, while guaranteeing access to water for the poor.

But the challenges are more complex than just focusing on the needs of the poor. Poor men and women have different needs and requirements for water; the women generally fetch the water, attend to the cooking, grow some vegetables; whilst the men use water for cattle. We must learn to differentiate between the needs of the poor and the not-poor, between poor men and women, and between the poor and the very poor often within one community.

We must recognise that, in any community, there are more privileged and less privileged households. The elderly, the disabled, female headed households, and, sadly, children headed households, are vulnerable groups that require our specific attention.

We must also find ways to give practical weight to the things that many of us know theoretically. One of these things is the understanding that poor people are not necessarily poor in knowledge. Poor households and communities have often developed sophisticated coping mechanisms. Poor households and communities often have subtle and well-developed knowledge of local conditions – biophysical, political and social. This knowledge is a key ingredient of any successful delivery programme. And yet the tendency remains to do things on behalf of poor people, rather than with them. Agenda 21, over a decade ago, called for the involvement of local communities in decisions that affected them. My own political party is committed to the concept of participatory democracy – our recent national conference reiterated this commitment, and called on us to empower local communities to take part, actively, in the democratic process.

Poor men and women have much to teach us, if we can only find the time and the humility to listen. One of the things that poor men and women can teach us is the complexity of their water needs. We need to hear what poor people are saying – that they need water not only for drinking, cooking and washing, but also for productive purposes. We must hear the desire of poor households to lift themselves up out of poverty, and the role that water can play in this process. In fact this is leading us to investigate the financial and technical commitments required to provide infrastructure to make access to water for productive purposes possible, just as we would create the infrastructure to provide water for economic development. In fact the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs is grappling with this challenge as government's food security programme.

And we are having to find ways to protect the water allocations of the poor against the demands of larger, more powerful users, particularly in situations of water scarcity. The poor must also be empowered to understand what water they are entitled to, and under what conditions.

It is interesting to me that the international discourse stresses water as an economic good. It is quite clear to me that water is much more than an economic good – it is also a social good, and we forget that at our peril. If we focus on water purely as an economic good, we lose sight of the rights of poor people to water for development, we lose sight of the citizens that we must serve. Instead, we limit ourselves to seeing the people that we must serve merely as consumers, as the end of a commercial chain. The challenge of eradicating poverty means that we must understand water to be both an economic and a social good.

Worldwide there are many positive examples now emerging of how better water supplies can impact on livelihoods and poverty eradication. This is good news, but they need to be supplemented and reported more widely. While research findings on these benefits

are increasing, there continue to be few technical, institutional, and financing models, or toolkits that address the wider needs of people for multi-purpose water access.

There is a genuine increase in recognition, across the water sub-sectors, of the need for an integrated water resources management approach to meeting people's water needs, and especially poor people's water needs. In particular, the domestic and irrigation sectors are starting to recognise the importance of small-scale water supplies at the community- and household-level (albeit from different starting points). These trends are encouraging evidence of a more integrated approach to water resource development and management. We are particularly proud, in South Africa, of the fact that our National Water Act of 1998, which is a scant four years old, has enshrined integrated water resources management into law. I am also proud of the fact that our legislation gives us a clear mandate to use water to redress the inequities of the apartheid system, and to ensure that those historically disadvantaged, have access to water for domestic and productive purposes.

This symposium, co-organized by my Department, IRC, NRI, and IWMI, brings more than 50 people together from all continents, with experience on small-scale integrated and multiple-use water management. You have come from the domestic water supply sector, rural and (peri-) urban irrigation, water resources management, waste water treatment, health and water, communities, or other. You include in your number policy makers, governments, Non-governmental/civil society, and research institutes. The discussions over the next three days should be both fascinating and rewarding. I hope that they are also productive and instructive. After all, this is not an academic exercise, but one that may influence the lives of poor people both here in South Africa and across the world. We owe it to those people, those who are hungry, weak and poor, to bring our best creativity, our best intellect and our most critical facilities to addressing the issue of how best water can be used, at the household level, to contribute to the

eradication of poverty and to the building of a world based on equality, dignity and recognition of the value of each and every human life.