

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF UMTATA PERI-URBAN WATER SUPPLY SCHEME,
UMTATA, EASTERN CAPE
Monday 24 February 2003**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS

It is a pleasure for me to once again be in this beautiful part of our country – the Eastern Cape Province. I am as delighted to be here today as the many times over the past few years that I was here. I have opened water supply schemes here, spoke to our people during National Water Week and Human Rights Day, opened community forestry projects. As always, today I am proud to see the dedication and will of the Eastern Cape Province's people to wipe out the backlog caused by Apartheid, and to make our democracy work.

I am delighted to see so many people here. We are here to celebrate the opening of the Umtata Peri-Urban Water Supply Scheme: A scheme that will serve over 80 000 people in a radius of 30 km around Umtata.... A scheme that will supply people with potable water, and that will treat waste water.... A scheme that will contribute to a better life for the people it will serve.

But this is not just a water supply scheme. It is much more. Let me tell you why I say so.

Cooperative governance

This scheme is a clear example of our government working to build a better life for all, a clear example of cooperative governance. It is an excellent example of what can be achieved when different government departments at national, provincial and local level together, and work together with the people whom they serve.

This occasion is the fruit of a long labour, from the day in September 1997 when our Comrade Minister Kader Asmal turned the first sod for the construction of the scheme with *this* spade.

It has been a labour of love for my Department. And I'm sure I can speak for and say the same for the Department of Housing and Local Government that co-funded the scheme with my Department under the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme. And I'm sure I can say the same for the OR Tambo District Municipality and for the many community members and other partners that worked together to make this large and complex project come to fruition.

Community driven project

Most importantly, the Umtata Peri-Urban Water Supply Scheme is an example of a community driven project. The communities living around Umtata demonstrated a clear drive to take ownership of and care for the project. About 50 people representing their villages served on the Project Steering Committee, with each village in turn having its own Water Management Committee.

Altogether 201 000 days of labour were contributed by community members themselves, the majority of them women. Jobs were created during construction, people developed new skills, and emerging contractors played a significant role in the scheme's implementation. Skills transfer took place so that revenue can be collected. Ownership of the reticulation network and its maintenance are now well advanced so there are sustainable benefits to be reaped by local contractors in the ongoing operation of the scheme.

Working together to wipe out the legacy of Apartheid, and the poverty it created

I am pleased to say that this scheme is an example of how we are working together to wipe out the legacy of Apartheid, and the poverty it created. I am pleased that at last all the families in the scheme will be able to improve their lives and no longer wait in queues for water from nearby rivers.

Nationally, our Government is determined to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment, and the building of a society based on justice and human rights. Our Constitution shows clearly the nature of the society we are trying to build. However, the legacy of apartheid means that, despite our best efforts since 1994, we still have a long way to go in this regard.

The recent cholera problem here in our Eastern Cape Province is an example of the challenges that we are facing. In the Umtata area, communities are currently dealing with the threat of cholera. Cholera is a disease of poverty. Lack of clean water, lack of sanitation, poor hygiene ... all of these contribute to the spread of cholera. The situation is made worse by poor nutrition and already vulnerable communities. Those without adequate food are more vulnerable to cholera than those who are well fed and healthy.

But with access to clean, potable water within 200 meters, the people around Umtata have a better chance to fight the evil of cholera.

Service delivery

This scheme also gives us an example of delivery of service by government to its people.

Since 1994, the Government has placed considerable emphasis on the delivery of clean water to the people of South Africa. Despite the challenges we face, much has changed over the past eight years. My Department alone has delivered clean water to over eight million rural people at a cost of billions of Rands.

Also, we have implemented our policy of Free Basic Water. 6 kilolitres per family per month are already provided to 26 million people in this country. This means that 66% of our people that have access to water infrastructure are benefiting from the programme of Free Basic Water.

We are also moving ahead in addressing the issue of sanitation. Government has adopted a national implementation strategy to deal with the backlog in sanitation by 2010. This means that, by 2010, we want every citizen of this country to have access to proper sanitation facilities. I am committed to increasing our spending in providing sanitation over the next few years.

Here in the Eastern Cape Province, we have made some millions of Rands available to accelerate the delivery on sanitation, to supply water and to address the cholera crisis. My Department has a total of 280 active projects in this province, 181 of them are water projects, 99 are sanitation projects. Seventy-one of these projects are in the OR Tambo District Municipality area, 47 of them water projects and 24 of them sanitation projects. These include the Cholera Intervention Project, to which I will return shortly.

At this point, I must mention the concerted efforts by the OR Tambo District Municipality to improve water supply and sanitation. We know of the challenges that face local government and we are committed to work together with local government structures on water and sanitation projects that are so important to our goals as government. We pledge our support and assistance to the OR Tambo District Municipality that in future will integrate water and sanitation projects in this area.

I wish we could already in 1994 have supplied every one of our country's people with access to water supply and sanitation. But we know the task of wiping out the legacy of Apartheid is a big one. Apartheid has caused a huge backlog in civil service delivery in this country. I give you my assurance that we are continuously fighting for more funding for water and sanitation projects, and continuously sourcing funding from outside our borders.

I must also tell you, though, that we have a grave responsibility and accountability in spending our funding wisely. I know that in some cases it takes time, but my Department is 100% committed to follow due process in order to be accountable for our funding, and to avoid and stamp out corruption.

I must also tell you that without the concerted cooperation of our colleagues in other national government departments, and in provincial and local government, my Department's efforts will be less effective. 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 can provide for themselves. My Department can only do this with the cooperation and help of other government structures – Vuk'Uzenzele! Together, we can do it!

Fighting cholera

This scheme is also an example of fighting cholera. Cholera is a disease of poverty, a disease of lack of clean water and proper sanitation. The people in the Umtata area know how devastating the effects of cholera can be on a community, especially with the outbreak in January this year.

This scheme will provide clean water to the people around Umtata, and will reduce the risk of cholera.

We initiated a Cholera Intervention Project in the Eastern Cape Province in 2001. Since then, we have transferred some millions of Rands to the OR Tambo District Municipality to implement measures to fight cholera, and have done many things ourselves. The project has already achieved a great deal, and has prevented the risk of cholera in many areas. Also, in January 2003, my Department approved a business plan of R44 million to the OR Tambo District Municipality to address high risk cholera areas through provision of clean potable water and sanitation facilities and education.

In addition, the Eastern Cape Government has provided R1 million to fight resurgence of cholera, and a Joint Operation Centre has been established comprising the OR Tambo District Municipality, the Eastern Cape Department of Health, my Department and other role players. District Sanitation Task Teams are assisting in many ways, including distribution of educational materials. This is another clear example of cooperative governance

Let me just give you a few examples of the actions to fight cholera, to provide people with access to clean water and proper sanitation. These actions will serve over 200 000 people in this area. Initially, the emphasis was on the Mqanduli area but this was

expanded to the Libode, Port St Johns and most recently in January 2003 to the Umtata area after cholera broke out in those areas. Here are the examples:

- Of course, there is the Umtata Peri-Urban Water Supply Scheme. But there are also other actions.
- Twenty springs are already protected, with a further 90 springs to be protected to be funded by the O R Tambo District Municipality.
- Seven boreholes were drilled and equipped in areas where there were no safe water sources. The Cholera Intervention Project also provides for further provision of clean, potable water by hand pump boreholes
- We supplied 500 dozen bottles of bleach (Jik) for disinfection, distributed by the OR Tambo District Municipality, coupled with health and hygiene training for affected communities
- A total of 1 451 VIP toilets were constructed in the areas affected, with a further 27 000 toilets to be constructed by the OR Tambo District Municipality with funding allocated by the Department.

Also, last year we launched the WASH Campaign. Let me tell you about it. While clean, safe water and adequate sanitation are critical to fight cholera, these alone are not enough to keep our children and ourselves safe. We must also practice good hygiene. Good hygiene is critical for good health.

Therefore, my Department last year launched a high-impact health and hygiene education programme through the WASH Campaign. This campaign teaches people to wash their hands after going to the toilet. It teaches women to wash their hands after changing their babies' nappies. It teaches people to always wash their hands before they handle food and before they eat. Washing your hands means you kill the germs and bacteria that are on them. Just washing hands has shown to reduce illness and death from water borne diseases by **40%**.

We launched this campaign with massive radio coverage and outdoor advertising on bill boards. Together with other government departments, we distributed many thousands of WASH pamphlets, posters, soap, Jik and T-shirts to communities, at taxi ranks, clinics and other public places. We also had a road show that reached some 2 000 villagers in the affected areas, explaining to people how important it is to practice good hygiene, and to wash their hands. We are right now doing further distribution of educational materials such as the WASH pamphlets and posters to reach councillors, schools, clinics and hospitals and others, combined with a research programme.

My Department has dedicated substantial resources to the WASH campaign for the coming year to spread the message of the need for good hygiene and sanitation. But

for WASH to be a success we need to do whatever it takes to get the message of handwashing out there. We all must join to popularise this campaign. This means communities working together with their local municipalities, clinics and schools. It means municipalities working with NGOs, and the Departments of Health, Education and Water Affairs and Forestry. It means national, provincial and local government working together. It means mobilising whatever resources we have available to spread the word and change behaviour.

By working together we can start to turn back the tide on waterborne diseases. There is no need for our children to be sick and dying from the harmful bacteria that are associated with dirty water.

I hope you will all join with the Department in spreading the simple message of handwashing so that together we can ensure a safer, more healthy future for our children. We must together build a better life for all – Vuk'Uzenzele.

Benefits to communities

What does it mean to people that potable water is now within easy reach of the majority of the peri-urban residents around Umtata? What does it mean that 43 villages, 80 000 people, will now have water to RDP standards, meaning that 25 litres of potable water per day will be delivered to within 200 meters of a household?

It means that those men, women and children that were last month struggling to find good, clean water, now can find it within easy reach. It means that those that have last month walked miles to find water, now have no more than 200 meters to go. It means that parents can spend more time with their families, children more time with their parents. It means that people who were at risk of ill-health because of lack of clean water, now have potable water for cooking, washing and personal hygiene. It means that the risk of waterborne diseases that were robbing those people and their children of their health and their lives has now gone away. It means that the lives of those people, and especially the lives of the women, have been enhanced by this access to water.

People, your scheme has already won two awards: the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme (CMIP) award for the best project in the Eastern Cape in 2000, and the Amatola Branch of the South African Institute of Civil Engineering award for community-based projects in 2001. The community-based project award was based on criteria for how the community benefited as a result of the work. Well

done! This shows the high quality of this scheme, and I hope you are all very proud of what you have achieved.

Amanzi ayimpilo! Water is life!

“Opening the tap” ceremony

So, it is with great hope and determination that we take another step towards the day when everyone has access to clean water that I open the Umtata Peri-Urban Water Supply Scheme.

I now declare the scheme officially open. Let the water flow! Remember to wash your hands!

Amanzi ayimpilo! Water is life!

Ends