

ADDRESS BY MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS, MP AT THE
WOMEN IN WATER / AMAKHOSIKAZI NAMANZI
ON 14 MARCH 2003

Honourable guests:

It is with great pride that I welcome all of you to this wonderful, celebratory occasion. Tonight we are applauding the diligently executed work of the women involved in the water sector, noting the hard fought battles to be recognised professionally, and equally, if not more importantly, to contribute to the empowerment of all communities and to the improvement of daily living conditions.

The inclusion of women in decision-making processes is vital. As South Africans we can say proudly that our post-1994 government has taken the issue to heart. Our parliament has one of the highest proportions of women in the world. We have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. We have women Ministers and Deputy Ministers, some of whom are here tonight, women leading powerful government departments, women who are leaders in business and industry, women who lead their communities. They are powerful, outspoken, committed, compassionate women who have taken the daily struggles of our people to a level beyond philosophy and mere words.

The high level representation we have here tonight, from government and other sectors, is testimony to the active participation of women in all spheres of life. And in the water sector we have many, many women who have made their mark.

The brief profiles of our ten finalists epitomise the varied contributions of women from all walks of life.

It is in order to recognise the role that women have played and continue to play in water management in South Africa that the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, the Water Research Commission and the Water Institute of South Africa established the Women in Water Awards. This initiative was launched last year, 2002, to honour and celebrate the hard work of women and to highlight the participation of professional and community-based women; and the key role women play in poverty eradication, education and sustainable development in both urban and rural settings.

This is an annual event in which we present awards to women who have played a leading role in five categories (either as individuals or groups):

The five categories are:

- *POLICY

- *MANAGEMENT

- *RESEARCH (OVER 35 YEARS OLD)

- *RESEARCH (UNDER 35 YEARS OLD)

*COMMUNITY

Last year, in inaugurating these awards, as Minister, I exercised a prerogative to recognise several few women whose work I felt exemplifies the calibre of women in water. I awarded 'Certificates of Recognition' to fourteen recipients. These women were honoured for the use of their knowledge, their skills, and their considerable capacity to ensure that water management in South Africa contributes to a better life for all.

This year, we had a nation-wide advertising campaign, followed by an independent adjudication process by a panel of experts. I must thank the panelists who willingly gave up their time to take part in this process: Buyelwa Sonjica (whom I must also congratulate on her well deserved promotion to Deputy Minister status – perhaps my award to her last year of a Women in Water certificate of recognition was a precursor to this greater level of recognition), Neil McCloud, Ethney Davey, Tally Palmer, Neo Moikangoa, Willie Modisha. Many thanks.

These panelists recommended two finalists in each category, and it is honour of all of these women that we are enjoying this pleasant occasion tonight.

Let me congratulate each of the ten finalists / our *AMAKHOSIKAZI NAMANZI*:

*POLICY – Dr Nozi Mjoli and Ms Manda Hinsch

*MANAGEMENT – Ms Renee van Hoeve and Ms Sarah de Villiers Leach

*RESEARCH (OVER 35 YEARS OLD) – Ms Joan Whitmore and Dr Jackie King

*RESEARCH (UNDER 35 YEARS OLD) – Dr Heidi Snyman and Dr Susan Barclay

*COMMUNITY – Ms Maria Kgabo and Ms Tingana Raphela

However, as with all competitions, a winner had to be chosen for each category. We will announce these winners to you later in the programme, once you are well fed and entertained.

Let me take this opportunity to say, however, that we dedicate these awards tonight to all the women of South Africa who have put their energy into the water sector, those that we know of, and those that we don't. We have delivered safe drinking water to 8 million people since 1994, and yet, each day, you will still see women walking long distances with buckets of water balanced precariously on their heads. These women dedicate what little resources they have, their bodies and their precious time, to fetching water for their families. These women, who wake up in the dark to start the process of fetching water, are the symbol that each of us should hold in mind as we do our work: we hold them in mind as a symbol of dedication and hard work that all of us should emulate; but we hold them in mind too, because they remind us that our work is far from over. We still have to provide water to several million South Africans. We still have to find ways to provide water not only for drinking, but for productive purpose too. We still have to meet the challenge of protecting our wetlands and our rivers from which so many poor people draw resources on which they depend, and from which all of us draw physical and spiritual health.

We must commit ourselves, men and women, to ensuring that our work continues to inspire all, men and women, and continues to make a difference to the lives of poor women and men.

My wonderful guests, let me thank each and everyone of you for supporting this initiative. This process has certainly been given stature by the participation of the esteemed members of the adjudication panel. A special word of thanks to Umgeni Water for their contribution and to all who have made tonight possible.

And now, I hope that you will all enjoy the dinner and entertainment that we have provided for you.

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