



MEDIA STATEMENT

Deputy Minister Mahlobo undertakes visit to strengthen bilateral cooperation between South Africa and Japan in the area of water and sanitation

23 February 2026

The Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation, David Mahlobo, will undertake a high-level visit to Japan from 23–27 February 2026 to strengthen bilateral cooperation between South Africa and Japan in the area of water and sanitation. The visit builds on the strong and enduring bonds between the two countries and advances the existing Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), with a particular focus on capacity building, skills transfer and sustainable water management solutions.

Deputy Minister Mahlobo undertakes the visit at a time when he has been closely engaged in efforts to stabilise water supply systems in Johannesburg, working alongside municipalities, water entities and communities to address infrastructure pressures and service delivery constraints. This hands-on experience in navigating complex operational and governance challenges brings a practical perspective to the delegation and positions the visit as a continuation of ongoing efforts to secure sustainable solutions for South Africa's water sector.

Deputy Minister Mahlobo will be accompanied by senior officials from the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency (MISA), reflecting a coordinated and whole-of-government approach to supporting municipalities and driving measurable reform in water management.

South Africa continues to face serious water sector challenges, with Non-Revenue Water identified in over 80 percent of assessed municipalities as a critical concern. Water that is lost through leaks, illegal connections or billing inefficiencies places immense strain on already constrained municipal finances and infrastructure systems. Reducing these losses is central to restoring reliable supply, protecting revenue, improving infrastructure performance and safeguarding scarce water resources in a climate-constrained environment.

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The visit builds on South Africa's active bilateral cooperation with the Government of Japan, represented by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. This partnership, formalised through a Memorandum of Cooperation, focuses on water infrastructure management, disaster risk reduction and capacity building, and has positioned Japan as a strategic technical partner in strengthening South Africa's water sector.

Through the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, South Africa has already advanced the development of a comprehensive Non-Revenue Water Training Programme aimed at strengthening the Department's Infrastructure Branch Training Centre in Roodeplaat. The technical cooperation has resulted in the construction of a specialised training yard that simulates real municipal water systems and provides hands-on, practical learning directly aligned to the operational realities faced by municipalities.

Implemented in collaboration with the South African Local Government Association and MISA, the programme is designed by municipalities for municipalities. It prioritises practical skills in pressure management, metering accuracy, data analysis and active leakage detection, ensuring that solutions are sustainable and embedded within local institutions.

In terms of the Technical Cooperation Agreement, ten South African officials per year over a three-year period will participate in specialised training of trainers programmes in Japan, producing thirty accredited trainers. From 2 to 13 February 2026, ten water sector officials, including representatives from municipalities, MISA and the Department, are participating in this intensive programme. This approach ensures that expertise gained in Japan is institutionalised locally and cascaded across the country.

During the visit, the delegation will engage with MLIT to review and strengthen the cooperation agreement, examine Japan's water governance and licensing systems, and explore advanced infrastructure and disaster resilience models. As South Africa advances the establishment of the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency, the delegation will also engage with the Japan Water Agency to draw lessons from its institutional framework. Technical visits will include integrated river basin and flood management systems, reinforcing the shared focus on resilience and long-term planning.

For Japan, the partnership highlights its role as a trusted development partner and creates opportunities for innovation exchange and collaboration. For South Africa, the benefits are tangible and immediate, including

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strengthened municipal capacity, improved operational systems and a clear pathway toward measurable reductions in water losses.

Deputy Minister Mahlobo's working visit to Japan demonstrates government's firm commitment to combining international best practice, strong bilateral partnerships and intensive skills development to address water challenges decisively. Through strengthened cooperation with Japan, South Africa is taking practical steps to improve service delivery, support municipalities and secure the nation's water future.

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