

**ADDRESS BY HON TREVOR MANUEL, MP**  
**MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA,**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT JACOB GEDLEYIHLEKISA ZUMA**  
**2<sup>ND</sup> AFRICA WATER WEEK,**  
**GALLAGHER ESTATE, MIDRAND – 11 November 2009**

Your Royal Highness, the Prince of Orange  
His Excellency Jean Ping, AU Commissioner Chairperson  
The President of AMCOW, the Honourable Bruno Jean-Richard Ituoa  
Honourable Minister of Water and Environment, Buyelwa Sonjica  
Honourable Ministers  
The representative of the G-8  
Cooperating Partners  
Distinguished Guests and Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am extremely privileged to extend the warmest welcome on behalf of His Excellency President Zuma and all South Africans. We appreciate your decision to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa Water Week in South Africa. I would hazard that each time you convene as AMCOW, the issues at hand are more pressing and much more demanding than on any previous occasion.

It used to be that in governments, the responsibility for water was unfashionable. This is no longer the case. It certainly is true that water was even the butt of jokes – few analysts forget Mark Twain's famous remark, "whiskey's for drinking, water's for fighting over." Most decision-makers now fully appreciate the interconnectedness of water to the developmental challenge, very few laugh at Mark Twain's remark because in many parts of Africa, water is truly for fighting over.

There is this deep, if playful poem by Kenneth Boulding, a now-departed economist that reads:

*Water is politics, water's religion,  
Water is just about anyone's pigeon  
Water is tragical, water is comical,  
Water is far from the pure economical.*

The responsibility for the provision of potable water is now no longer the exclusive domain of the hydraulics engineers. Of course, they remain a fundamentally important part of the development chain – without the knowledge and expertise we will not be able to harvest, irrigate or reticulate water. But their input is only a part of the wherewithal – too often their skills are not called upon because water provision drops down the list of government priorities. The outcome is measured in failures measured in the healthcare system. In 2006 the United Nations Development Report was devoted to the water theme – in that report, the UNDP remarked that your hostess, Minister Sonjica has a rare and distinct privilege as a Water Minister whose budget is larger than that of her colleague in Defence. Yet, even here, there are examples of dams that are brimming, yet communities in the immediate vicinity of these dams remain unserved.

Too often, however, even after the spending on water infrastructure rollout, we see very little financial resources committed to the maintenance of the very infrastructure and water schemes. In the consequence, risks to the utility of schemes, to the water safety and consequently to health mount, despite significant investments of taxation, borrowings or grant aid sunk into water schemes. One of the biggest challenges facing all of us in the developing world is the rate of unplanned urbanisation – it is very clear that the poor will not remain trapped in rural poverty, on unproductive and dry land. One of the immediate responsibilities that arises from this is the provision of adequate sanitation. The World Health Organisation estimates that there are some 2.6 Billion people worldwide who do not have adequate sanitation – they do not even have proper sanitation that prevent wastes from spreading into the environment.

Even when all of the infrastructure spending is available and properly aligned – this is a rarity, according to the UNDP – the politics of consumption take root. Is access to clean drinking water a right, or merely a privilege? Who should have access to that right? What happens to that right when a government either starts out poor or chooses to avail water provision to a private company – who guarantees the right? And when the right is accorded – how much of it should be available? And to whom should it be available? Despite the advice so frequently proffered to us in the developing world, we need to be

aware of water as a public good. In the USA, for example, public water systems have supplied drinking water to about 85% of the population. This situation has prevailed since World War 2, and is very different from the situation about a century ago when the majority of the US water systems were private.

What course should we Africans pursue – water for profit, or as a right? If we choose the latter, as I hope we will take as a starting point, we need also to remind ourselves that we're living on Earth in 2009 with the same amount of water that was available in 1900, while in the meantime the global population has quadrupled.

And when all of the infrastructure and rights issues are in place and adequately prioritized, are governments adequately equipped to introduce measures to manage this finite and diminishing resource? Have we the ability to adequately regulate? Are we by the administrative means to regulate to prevent theft and abuse? Can we adequately police all of our sovereign territory to maintain policy and implementation control? But, we also need an understanding that water doesn't carry a passport – cross-boundary resources need to be regulated, governed and implemented consistently through treaties that still have to be concluded across the African continent.

How do we deal with polluters? Do we correctly price to limit abuse? Do we collect the necessary user charges, fees, and fines? In other words, do we take the task of water as seriously as it deserves to be taken now?

I return to the notion that "water is for fighting over" because before we can build the dams and the pipelines, the water schemes and the irrigation channels; before we can legislate, regulate or guarantee the rights of access, there is one important outstanding variable – and at present much too variable, and that is precipitation.

One cannot but be alarmed by the extent of the earth's surface presently experiencing drought. In Africa, drought is abundant and frequently spans sufficient seasons for mega-droughts to be considered endemic across the continent. But take a view also of countries as far apart as the USA and Australia, measure the impact of drought there as well and then take a fresh look at Africa.

What sets us apart is in too many places virtually nothing has been spent on rain harvesting and storage, so the absence of rain very speedily translates into the absence of water. Right now we are living through one of the worst droughts in memory and its impact is most severe in the continent's poorest countries. We are witnessing the impact across the widest expanse of Africa – from the Horn to the Bulge – affecting countries

such as Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Chad, and into Burkina Faso and Mali. Tens of thousands of nomadic herders across this band have lost all of their livestock, all of their livelihoods and have no financial resources to acquire food. This tragedy is profound but, too frequently, hidden from view. Yet, in most of Africa, water access and water rights are tied to land distribution, a feature that frequently reflects or brings about the greatest inequities in our societies. However, as water becomes more scarce, the impact of inequitable distribution is not only a cause for stress in the poorest communities, it also destroys traditional societies.

We are also seeing crop farmers in these and other regions across the continent unable to plant and therefore unable to harvest in successive years, and as with herders, lose their livelihood and the means with which to buy food. This year again, we will see a few million more Africans driven into deeper poverty (there are almost twenty million people in East Africa already dependent on food assistance, and this number will surely grow exponentially larger) and with it, the prospect of realizing the Millennium Development Goals is pushed further and further beyond the horizon.

But it is not just hunger and a struggle against the absence of nutrition, more and more studies have now demonstrated the link between drought and internecine conflict. It stands to reason that when the traditional livelihood of a people is disrupted, such as by the absence of water, the destruction of livestock or crop failure, a remedy is sought by attacking those who appear to be less worse off. So the absence of rain, has also increasingly become a matter for national security.

The bad news for Water Ministers is that there is little to suggest that the situation will improve in the short term. Now, we all understand that "global warming" is a misnomer for climate change. Indeed, climate change affects not only temperature, but also rain, storms, the growing season, and everything else to do with weather. Compounding this problem is the El Niño – which will bring exceedingly heavy rains (when they do arrive), resulting in floods, and the destruction of crops, livestock, infrastructure and homes.

As Africans, we have been encouraged to monocrop – this was after all, the advice of economists under structural adjustment, it appeared to make sense at the time, focus on one cash crop for exports and use the foreign currency earned to purchase basic food needs on the open market. The problem arises when your cash crop collapses – then apart from price, the farmer has to deal with all manner of weeds and pests that take root in changed weather patterns. Regrettably, the econometric models and spreadsheets on offer did not include the prospects of droughts, floods and pestilences.

And if you thought that the challenges of agriculture were the exclusive preserve of our colleagues, the Ministers for Agriculture, think again. No water, means no agriculture. Insufficient harvests mean price escalations, which in turn impacts on accessibility and as Bob Marley once sang, "A Hungry Man is an Angry Man." And we're back to security issues.

#### Distinguished Delegates

As we prepare chapter and verse of our collective position to be argued at Copenhagen in a few weeks, let us remember that the issues of climate change are real in all of our lives. Let us remind the world that the challenges we face range from deep hunger to national security. Let us also be reminded that there is so much attention paid, and correctly so, to carbon emissions. So much of the focus is on low carbon emitting energy sources – the race is on to maximize the technology and spread of energy alternatives. With energy, there are alternatives, with water, there is none.

We should haul out the past commitments made here in Johannesburg at the WSSD. We should bring back into play the commitment to partnership and interdependence that defined the Monterrey Consensus of March 2002. Let us remind ourselves and the World that we took the principles of partnership and interdependence forward with our collective commitment to NEPAD, where the "P" is the same as the partnership agreed to at Monterrey. And then let the world's leaders together proclaim that behavioral change is necessary and will be costly.

I urge you to remind all the world's leaders that "*Maji ni Uzima*"; "*Eau est Vie*" and that as Africans we have been robbed of water, robbed of life and that democracy itself is imperiled. We have as a reminder the words of Maude Barlow, the co-author of *Blue Gold: The Battle Against Corporate Theft of the World's Water*, who said, "Every day more children die from dirty water than HIV/AIDS, malaria, war and accidents put together." I hope that this message will become the battle-cry of the AMCOW.

Distinguished delegates, I wish you well in what remains of this, the 7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of AMCOW. We learn that the responsibility to chair AMCOW will be bestowed on South Africa later this week. We consider this a distinct privilege. Please be assured that His Excellency, President Zuma, and the entire Cabinet stand fully behind Minister Sonjica as she takes on this task. We wish you well in your deliberations and plead that you enjoy your stay in our country.

Thank you for your kind attention.