

**WELCOME ADDRESS AT WRC EVENT ON 28th SEPTEMBER**  
**Our water: Our heritage and legacy**

**By**  
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**Introduction**

Water is a natural rhythm of the earth. It is life, it is nutritional, it is calming.

It is a basic need and engine for growth.

The body needs water before it needs food.

There is strength in water - it can be a boundary and when you cross it's an achievement.

The freedom fighters experienced this during the liberation struggle when they had to cross rivers, not because they wanted to but were forced to and their ultimate goal was to liberate this country of ours.

**SA History and the Constitution**

It is very important for all of us to remember that the right to water was very hard fought for - we could not leave it out when drawing up our Constitution.

The cruelty of the Apartheid regime was not only about political rights. It was much deeper. It denied people basic rights and access to the most basic of resources - one of the important being water.

As a child I fetched water from a spring and did wishing in some small river near our house. We also had to fetch water so my mother could grow vegetables.

This whole thing robbed people of basic nutrition, and good health on the one hand. It also robbed people of their dignity. Have you ever seen a white child carrying a bucket of water on her head??? Never!!!! I remember one time I was already entering my parents' yard and my neck gave in so the bucket fell. I cried hard but I had no choice but to go back to the river. Difficult access to water for things we should take for granted like keeping ourselves and our children clean means robbing people of their dignity.

Our liberation struggle was about all these things - a right to basic needs for all our people, and a right to dignity.

Our people demanded that this right be recognized and enshrined in 1996 because they knew that 65% to 70% of your entire body mass is made up of water and that nearly 80% of diseases in developing countries is linked to poor water and sanitation conditions.

We are one of the few countries in the world that enshrine the basic right to sufficient water in our Constitution. In terms of the 1996 Constitution, "Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water".

Water supply and sanitation in South Africa is characterized by both achievements and challenges. At the advent of democracy, President Mandela's newly elected government inherited huge services backlogs with respect to access to water supply and sanitation.

However, the role played by stakeholders such as water boards, research and training institutions, municipalities, business and civil society in ensuring that our people enjoy to the fullest their constitutional right to access to clean and safe water can never be overestimated.

### **Today**

Much remains to be done to fulfill the freedom of access to clean and safe drinkable water.

Now, many people have moved to urban areas since our dispensation in 1994 but of course we have always had miners coming to the land of gold. Have their living conditions changed??? NO. We still have so many shacks - is there water there and proper sanitation?? NO. This is painful. What were we fighting for???? Domination???

We need proper infrastructure. The poor here at home continue to suffer. We have to make sure that the use of water benefits all. The previous regime was running big farms and they still do and had a way of preserving water by way of boreholes.

This definitely mirrors some kind of inequality because even now as am standing here some of our people continue to drink contaminated water and as a result they get diseases like cholera etc.

We have the sea, the rivers which help with transportation of people or goods. I still remember very clearly the Mwanza marine tragedy in 1996 when a passenger ship, the M.V. Bukoba, with about five hundred passengers on board, sank in Lake Victoria about eight miles north-west of the town of Mwanza. Most of these were traders transporting their goods.

On the positive side, look at the Cahora Bassa dam (Zambezi basins) and the Lesotho Highlands water Project, when completed in 2020, will have a hydro-electricity generating capacity of about 180 megawatts (MW) and about 2 200 million cubic metres per annum of water will be transferred from Lesotho to South Africa. Let it be, but all South Africans should benefit.

### **Water and Cultural Cohesion**

Now I shall talk a bit about Water and cultural cohesion.

I lived in Nigeria for quite some time during the liberation struggle and they have many rivers and the sea of course. The women run big markets and they needed water all the time to keep their vegetables fresh as well as ice to keep their fish fresh. Some keep their small children right there which means that there should be enough water.

I also spent many years in exile in Norway as the ANC's Chief Representative. The truth of the matter is that the Norwegians love water - they are surrounded by water! Most of them have their own boats and in summer they enjoy being in the water - it's their life. A lot travel by boat, enjoy fishing and they are famous for their salmon. 99 percent of the people do the right thing to make sure what they have is preserved.

Crossing from one island to the other is by means of water (boats). The latest tragedy when the youth were gunned down I went to see things for myself and of course in solidarity with the Norwegian people. Some of the youth tried to swim across to save their lives. Once again we are emphasizing the importance of water.

In Tanzania, where I opened the first South African High Commission following our democratic dispensation, you find fresh vegetables in every yard because there is water for women to plant vegetables and you will find bananas and paw paws in every home.

The same is true for Mozambique in which I spent seven years as the South African High Commissioner. Mozambicans have no reason to starve; they make sure there is food and fruits.

## **Conclusion**

One can go on and on but this connection of water to our individual cultures, while different in different places, unites us as we use water as our connector of people and a connector of worlds, our real everyday world to the spiritual world.