

OFFICIAL OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, AMBASSADOR CHUPU MATHABATHA ON THE OCCASION OF THE PROVINCIAL WATER AND SANITATION SUMMIT, HELD AT WARMBATHS RESORTS, BELA-BELA.

16 October 2018

Programme Director, MEC Jerry Ndou;
Our keynote speaker, Minister Gugile Nkwinti;
Members of the Executive Council;
Our host District Executive Mayor, Councillor Mories Mataboge;
Our host local Mayor, Councillor Ngobeni;
Executive Mayors and Mayors from municipalities across the Province;
Director General; Ntate Nape Nchabeleng;
Leaders of Parastatals present;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first and foremost thank our host Mayor, Councillor Ngobeni for his warm welcome to this beautiful town of Bela-Bela.

I am confident that everyone is already feeling welcome and truly at home.

Secondly, let me also take this opportunity to appreciate the presence of all of you in this meeting.

Just by looking around, I am convinced that this is an assembly of all strategic role players in the field of water and sanitation.

There is no doubt that your presence and participation in this summit will go a long way in enhancing the quality of the discussions and the resolutions to be adopted in this summit. The Minister of Water and Sanitation, Honourable Gugile Nkwinti had earlier expressed his wish to be part of this important summit; however, because of his parliamentary obligations he is not able to join us.

However, the Minister has sent a high-level delegation from his Office to be with us in this summit. I am convinced that the summit will benefit greatly from their presentation.

My humble plea as we commence with this summit, is that, this summit carries the expectations of the ordinary men and women of our province who are struggling to access portable water;
This summit carries the hopes of our business community;
The hopes and the yearning of our agricultural and the mining community are pinned on this summit.

The growth and development of the economy of this province will to a greater extent depend on the work to be done in this summit.

We simply cannot afford to disappoint the expectations of our people.

It is for this reason that this summit has no choice but to become a resounding success.

Programme Director;

This summit as you would know; is a follow up to the summit we hosted in 2015 in Tzaneen. I know that we will receive a comprehensive update on the implementation of these resolutions.

Our task in this summit is therefore to engage robustly and honestly with this implementation progress report. In the process of engaging with this report, we must also make necessary inputs which will help to guide our future actions in this regard.

The specific focus for this year's Summit will be on matters of:
The provisioning of bulk infrastructure and water resource planning
The issue of water reticulation
The issue of water to support economic development
Water treatment works and rural sanitation, and
The issue of operations and maintenance.

At the end of the day, this summit would have betrayed its purpose if it does not come up with practical, workable and lasting solutions to our water supply challenges. We expect nothing less than that.

Programme Director;

I think there can be no denying to the fact that the country and our province in particular is still recovering from the effect of the drought. This reality has worsened the situation with regard to the delivery of water to our communities.

Commercial consumers have also been severely and negatively affected by the effects of the drought.

Experts are warning us to get used to these drought conditions. This reality is imposed on us by the phenomenon of global warming.

This shortage of water supply has also had a negative impact on the implementation of our LDP targets.

The bold plans we have enumerated in the LDP are dependent on the availability of realisable and sufficient water supply.

It is impossible to grow the economy without water playing a major role in that regard.

The task to industrialise our economy requires abundance and reliability of water supply. Even foreign investors would first ask questions about the reliability of water supply before they can commit their resources to any project.

Our very target to reduce the backlog of access to decent sanitation facilities in the province requires water.

I know that at some stage some of the municipalities have had to put a moratorium on new settlement developments because of this challenge of the supply of water.

It is clear that water plays a major role in the growth and development of any economy. This is the understanding that should guide our discussions and deliberations in this summit.

Programme Director;

For us to succeed with our plans, we will require some levels of partnership and integrated planning between the national Department, the Provincial Government and our municipalities.

For an example, for our Provincial Water Master Plan to realise its intended objectives, it should be aligned to the IDP priorities of our municipalities which are Water Service Authorities.

In this regard, we will be able to address the problematic challenge of having water in bulk yet communities not being able to access such water.

The story of De Hop Dam is well documented. The government has spent billions of Rand developing that infrastructure, yet communities around the place are not having access to water.

In this regard, the Department and municipalities must accelerate the plans that are already in the pipelines to ensure that the water reaches our communities.

At the same time, municipalities must be willing to deal with the issue of illegal connections to the main water pipelines. We know that this criminal conduct destabilises planning and results in serious water losses.

This task should be linked to the capacity of doing regular maintenance and repairs of our water pipelines. We are losing a lot of water through leakages and this needs to be arrested.

In some instances, municipalities are billed for the water that has not even reached communities because of these leaks.

We are also happy that the bottlenecks which had negatively affected the Giyani Water Project are being addressed. We welcome the resolution of the dispute with the service provider with regard to that project.

The other point we need to address and deal with in this summit is the issue of water use management. I am happy that colleagues from the National Department are here to listen to our views.

It is our view that the current licensing regime is outdated and not in touch with contemporary developments.

The truth is that in Limpopo, for an example, water consumption patterns have changed significantly.

What we need is a licensing regime that takes these changes into account.

In our case, we want the licensing regime to also be supportive to our Provincial Growth Points.

In particular, our SEZ municipalities of Musina and Makhado will require a significant support. You would be aware that our Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is expected to revitalize Limpopo's industrial economy. This will be done by utilising our local mineral resources and integrating the industrial chains of both the upstream and downstream.

Several plants will be constructed under this SEZ projects. These include coal washery, Coal-fired Power Plant, coking plant, stainless steel plant, and high-carbon ferrochrome plant.

Supporting administrative services such as houses, hotels, shopping malls, healthcare facilities and schools will also be constructed as part of this SEZ initiative.

Initially, it was projected that this project was expected to create about 20 000 jobs for the people of this Province. Currently, the potential employment figures are being revised up. This is because of huge interest and appetite for investors to participate in this project.

As I have said, we need to invest significantly in the development and maintenance of our water infrastructure, otherwise we will not be able to realise the full potential of this SEZ initiative.

Colleagues, whilst it is tempting to speak for on water in the context of commercial use or water as a catalyst for economic development, we should not forget that our people require water for domestic use.

Our people need sufficient and reliable water supply so that they can be able to cook, wash their clothes, take bath and water their small gardens.

This is a very important use for water which we must never take for granted.

We must always remember that water represent life whilst sanitation speaks to our people's dignity.

Colleagues from municipalities know what it means for communities to be without drinking water.

It is our job to find lasting solutions to the challenges of taking water to the communities.

Programme Director;

I am aware that a prolonged speech runs the risk of holding you hostage beyond your scheduled hours.

I will therefore wish to conclude my opening remarks by inviting everyone to participate freely in this summit with a view to enrich our resolutions.

I once again wish to thank you very much for your attendance, may we enjoy honest and robust deliberations.

I thank you!