

**Opening of AfricaSan 2008**  
**Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**International Convention Centre, Durban**  
**18 February 2008**

Good Morning, Jambo, Habari, Sawubona, Molweni, Bon-journo, Salam Alaykum, Hola

- Minister Bruno ITOUA, MEH, President of AMCOW
- Honourable Ministers and Leading Figures in AMCOW
- Ministers of Health, Housing, Public Works, Energy, Irrigation Cooperatives, Rural Development and Social Services
- Representatives from the United Nations
- Representatives from Donor Organisation (Department for International Development (DFID), Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA))
- Representatives from the European Union (EU);
- Representatives from Financial Institutions: the African Development Bank (AfDB); the World Bank and the European Investment Bank
- Representatives of the Civil Society Organizations
- The Private Sector
- Directors-General and Permanent Secretaries of States
- Delegates,

On behalf of the conveners and hosts of the AfricaSan 2008 Conference and the Government of the Republic of South Africa, let me extend a warm welcome to all of you to South Africa. We are grateful for the opportunity to host an event of such importance; and we are sincerely humbled by your positive and overwhelming response to our invitation to get together and deal with one of the critical developmental challenges facing our continent.

The lack of decent sanitation is a challenge that all of us face in Africa. It has become clear that not having access to basic services such as sanitation holds back development – and has health, economic, education and social implications. Provision of sanitation is an investment in our people and must be given greater priority.

About five years ago, the first AfricaSan Conference held in Johannesburg put the challenges of sanitation in Africa on the agenda. That conference was instrumental in setting the specific sanitation Millennium Development Goal, namely, to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe sanitation by 2015. The first AfricaSan looked at how to accelerate delivery of safe and sustainable sanitation services; and was followed by sub-regional dialogues and events in Southern Africa, East Africa, and West Africa. Like AfricaSan, these meetings provided delegates with an opportunity to discuss technical issues related to the effectively delivery of sanitation, look at some of the political challenges, discuss hygiene issues, and debate the challenges facing sanitation. Arising from these engagements toolkits to assist field workers were developed, and health and hygiene marketing and awareness campaigns run.

The approach used by AfricaSan of bringing together a range of different players and stakeholders in the sanitation sector for dialogue is regarded as an effective way of raising awareness and creating momentum for the provision of safe and sustainable sanitation services in many parts of the world.

With 2008 having been declared the International Year of Sanitation, I cannot think of a better way of marking this year than hosting an event of this nature in Africa. We have convened AfricaSan 2008 to take stock of the progress made since the first conference, and to put in place the mechanisms required to enhance Africa's drive to improve provision of safe sanitation and hygiene facilities.

From the attendance at this conference one can see the huge commitment to addressing the challenges of sanitation. The fact that we have delegates present here today from over 42 of the 52 African nations, and more than 35 national ministers from all over the continent gracing the occasion is a significant message we are sending to the world at large, that indeed, Africa is ready to tackle challenges facing our continent.

We also have a number of government officials, people from non-government organisations, representatives from donor organisations, technical experts, and more who are here to make this conference a success.

The focus of this conference will go beyond looking at progress achieved by Africa in meeting the Millennium Development Goals; the discussions that will be held over the next few days will contribute to better understanding the real challenges facing delivery of safe sanitation in the continent, and come up with practical plans to improve the situation. Through our interactions we will be able to learn from successes of those who have pioneered new approaches, technologies, and methodologies that are suitable to the conditions in the continent. We will also have the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others so that we can avoid repeating them.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, the messages of the International Year of Sanitation: that sanitation is vital for health and good for the environment, that sanitation is a good economic investment and good for social development, and that sanitation is achievable; are messages that are supported by the South African Government – not only at a theoretical and policy level but in the day to day work of our government. As a government we have committed to creating a better life for our people, which has resulted in us driving massive programmes to provide not only sanitation to our people, but also clean water, electricity, and housing.

In rolling out these programmes we have been confronted with new challenges; in the area of sanitation these include the additional burden placed on waste water treatment plants, the increased demand for water-borne sanitation even when there is inadequate water resources to accommodate such requests, a continuous moving target because of the growth of new informal settlements, VIPs filling up and many many more challenges. So while we are very proud of we have achieved in the provision of sanitation to our people, and have met the Millennium Development Goal of halving the population of people without sanitation, we recognise that there is a lot we can still learn from other countries in Africa in how to overcome some of the obstacles we face.

Much of the progress that we have made in sanitation has only been since the last AfricaSan conference, as up until that point my department's focus and resources were directed to the delivery of water. During this period we have received a great deal of support from our Head of State, President Mbeki, whose support, pressure and encouragement have enabled us to make such strides. President Mbeki has set us targets for the delivery of sanitation to clinic's, schools, and households. Our most recent target was to eradicate the bucket sanitation system in the formal settlements by December 2007. Remarkable achievements have been attained in this 'bucket eradication programme' and although not all the buckets have been removed by the end of last year, we came very close and should see those remaining being removed in the next few weeks. However we are still faced with dealing with the sanitation needs of those living in the newly created informal settlements. Our bucket eradication programme has taught us some hard lessons; and through conferences such as AfricaSan we would be able to share the lessons of what worked and did not work. We are also very excited to hear about other programmes and what is working or not working in other countries.

Two weeks ago, our President delivered his annual State of the Nation Address. In this speech, he made it very clear that the current challenges facing South Africa as a developing economy required innovation and an added sense of urgency. His theme was "Business Unusual" – implying that if we continue to do things in the usual way, we will not address the needs of our people and create the better life that they have been promised. President Mbeki was unfortunately not able to join us today but his message is still very relevant to us: If we are to see improved sanitation delivery in the continent, it will require a "business unusual" approach. AfricaSan+5 is the right stimulus to further push delivery of sanitation services.

The upcoming General Assembly of the African Union, which will be held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in July this year, is an important forum to table the messages coming out of AfricaSan. Already a decision made at the last General Assembly of the African Union is that the focus of this upcoming event will be on water and sanitation. The discussions we have over the next few days will no doubt positively contribute to the General Assembly.

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, we should be proud of progress made in other areas in Africa, especially the creation of institutions like the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), which are able to provide leadership in delivery of water and sanitation in the continent. It is up to all of us to strengthen the effectiveness of these institutions so that they efficiently articulate the needs and aspirations of Africa.

Like the first AfricaSan conference in 2002, I know we will go home from this conference with more than just knowledge; we would have made contacts, met with a number of support organisations, looked at possible programmes that we can run in our own country, and forged real partnerships to assist one another in delivering sanitation programmes - armed with all of this we can and should deliver more effective sanitation programmes to our people.

In conclusion, let me take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those individuals and organisations who have been involved in organising this conference.

- The African Development Bank.
- AMCOW.
- The United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB).
- UNICEF.
- Water and Sanitation Programme for Africa (WSP-Af).
- Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC).
- The World Bank Group.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO).
- The South African Local Government Association (SALGA),
- The Ethekwini Metropolitan Municipality – thank you Durban for this wonderful venue and your contributions for our conference.
- The EU and the donors for your continued support of our programmes.

I thank you