

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS & FORESTRY,
RONNIE KASRILS,
AT A TREE PLANTING AT KIRSTENBOSCH
Arbor Week, Cape Town, September 1999**

I am very honoured to be here with you today. Honoured and moved to have the opportunity to attend a tree planting ceremony at this site of one of our great national treasures – the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. And I want to thank the National Botanical Institute for its active involvement in greening projects.

As we draw near the end of this year's Arbor Week, I would like to begin by reflecting a little on the many and various events I have attended and their significance for us as South Africans.

When I became the new Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry a few months ago, I asked myself, what does Arbor Day mean for our country?

'Arbor' means tree in Latin. But, in the same way as we give a species both a Latin and a popular name, we need to find a way of making Arbor Day speak to us in a language that we can all understand and share.

Trees are wonderful things. They give us shade. They make our neighbourhoods green. They add beauty and peace to our lives.

Trees also enrich the soil and supply the world with oxygen. The big forests of the world ~~convert poisonous gasses into the oxygen~~ the rest of us need to live.

Deleted: give off

Deleted: carbon dioxide

Many people still use trees and other plants for medicines. The bark and leaves of some trees are used to make things that heal us when we are ill. Many of the things we buy in the pharmacy are derived from plants and trees.

For many centuries, people have used trees in religious and spiritual ways.

Many years ago in some countries, people planted trees when children were born. They planted them as a celebration of a great event in their lives.

In others places, people planted trees in order to remember someone who had died. As a way to make sure the memory of that person lives forever.

Trees are a symbol of life and growth. When we plant a tree, we know that it will live and grow for a long time. Every year it will renew its leaves. It will continue to give beauty, not only to us, but to those who live after us.

And, in the same way, when we plant a tree in memory of somebody, we know that that memory will live on. We know that, every time we see that tree, it will remind us of the person who died or was hurt. It will remind us that there are ways of turning our grief into something good and strong and beautiful.

In South Africa we are in great need of ways to deal with our grief and anger.

One of the ways we do this is by remembering and honouring those who are lost to us, those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom and democracy; and those

who, in the terror of those years, simply found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We also need to find ways to bring people and communities together. Powerful symbols that bind us with a common purpose.

In KwaZulu Natal, on Sunday, I attended a most moving and inspiring event. At a place called Imbali, we planted trees for reconciliation in the province.

The name Imbali means flower and the place itself is a tribute to the spirit of reconciliation the people of that province – and indeed all the people of South Africa – long for.

In the early 1990s, Imbali was a killing field, torn by conflict and bloodshed. People despaired that peace would ever come to Imbali. And then, suddenly and unexpectedly, Imbali was flooded. It was a natural disaster, causing devastation and loss of life ...

And yet, this flood brought the people of Imbali together. Together they worked to restore the damage and rebuild the community. And from that time in 1995, Imbali blossomed into a flower of reconciliation, an example to all communities still torn by conflict.

It is a simple formula, a formula that involves working together, burying our differences and building our communities.

In Pietermaritzburg, at that deeply moving ceremony, we called on the people of KwaZulu-Natal to plant a hundred thousand Izimbali. We called for the planting of izihlahla ukutula, trees of peace, all over South Africa.

This year, during our Arbor Week celebrations, we have travelled the length and breadth of the country, planting izihlahla ukutula, trees of peace.

And we have tried to make each event special in its own way. It has not been simply a matter of picking up a spade, planting a tree and going on to my next engagement.

Each event has been arranged to bring people together in a spirit of renewal, regeneration and growth. In a thoughtful moment of remembrance or a deep expression of the desire for reconciliation.

Together ... today ... we will again do a thing of great beauty and hope.

We will plant seven indigenous trees here in Kirstenbosch, each one in honour of a different and vulnerable sector of our society.

And as we do so, we should remember that the number seven has a special significance for Kirstenbosch, one of the seven top botanical gardens in the world. One of the 'magnificent seven' I believe it has been named here!

The *Podocarpus falcatus* or Outeniqua Yellowwood has been chosen to honour the aged. This is an extremely long-lived tree, which towers over the forest and

provides support for surrounding trees.

The *Vigilia divaricata* or Keurboom has been chosen to honour the youth. This vigorous tree is usually planted as a pioneer species to create a foundation around which other trees can grow.

The *Milletia grandis* or Umzimbeet will honour people with disabilities. Walking sticks are made from the hard, durable heartwood of these trees.

The *Portulacaria Afra* or Spekboom will honour victims of crime. This tree is extremely strong and resistant, despite constant attack by animals in the valley bushveld biome. Indeed, the resilience of the tree grows with this browsing.

The *Dais Cotinifolia* or Pompon will be planted to honour women. The bark of this tree is so strong that it is highly sought-after as a source of rope. It has been chosen to signify the inner strength of women.

The *Warburgia salutaris* or Pepper-bark will honour the victims of HIV/AIDS. The epithet, “salutaris”, is a reference to the perceived healing qualities of this protected tree.

The *Ficus sur* or Cape wild fig will honour literacy and learning. Throughout Africa, this tree has provided a sheltered meeting-place for people to gather and learn. And we need to remember that today is World Literacy Day.

Every year each of these seven trees will put out its leaves and grow a little

bigger.

Each year, these and all the other trees we have planted throughout the country will add shade and beauty to our environment. Greening our urban and rural wastelands. Harboring our memories and providing living expression of our deep need for peace, gentleness and reconciliation in our country.

Izihlahla ukutula ... trees of peace.

This is why we would like to ask all of you ... why we would like to ask everyone in South Africa ... to make trees part of our lives. Not just during Arbor Week. Not just today. But every day.

I would like us to spend a moment quietly remembering all those who have been hurt in the past and those who are hurting now. I would like us to think about those who are most vulnerable in our society, and about the terrible crimes that are committed daily against them. I would like us to think about those who are ill, those who are afraid, those who are in pain.

I would also like us to remember those who are not here because they have been senselessly, sometimes brutally killed, for no reason except that they were there. Because some angry, sick person decided that they should die.

Let us spend a moment quietly together thinking about these things.

PAUSE FOR REMEMBERING

Thank you.

The trees we planted today will survive far, far longer than many of us here.

I would like to think that they will leave a message for all of us, a message we can leave for our children and our children's children.

I would like to believe that they will offer them shelter from the sun.

And that, with the other trees we plant, they will enrich the soil and add beauty and greenery to this place in the years to come.

And I would like to think, too, that these trees will continue to carry a deeper, more important message for all of us here.

Serving as a signpost that we stood here together today and remembered the many other people who could not be with us.

And, in this spirit of growth, of renewal and commemoration, I would like to call on all of you, on all South Africans ...

Plant a tree. And heal our land.

Deleted: ¶
¶
¶
¶