

MEDIA RELEASE



Viva Water Pure and Clean *Viva Forests Rich and Green*
Department of Water Affairs and Forestry - Chief Directorate: Communication
Services

MEDIA STATEMENT BY MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS, MP MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY

8 April 2001

Embargo: Immediate

On 29 March 2001 "Business Day" reported that I was being investigated over alleged irregularities in the government's arms procurement deal. Despite my statement that I was unaware of any such investigation, denial that I was involved in any form of corruption and was willing to open my bank account to public scrutiny, the newspaper continued with its allegations. The allegations were taken up by other sections of the media, including radio and television. Business Day based their report on "sources close to the investigation".

It is not a pleasant experience to be falsely accused and I am grateful that the Auditor-General has now written to my attorneys, confirming on behalf of all three agencies that I am indeed not the subject of investigation. I expect those sections of the media that have continuously linked me to investigations of corruption to immediately correct their reports and prominently apologise for their error. I reserve my rights with regard to all libellous reports.

I wish to make it clear that I fully support President Mbeki's anti-corruption drive and in fact am actively leading such a programme in the Department Of Water Affairs and Forestry. I support the role of the media in exposing corruption, dishonesty and malpractice in public life. But this requires responsible, ethical and professional standards of journalism. Information from anonymous and undisclosed sources may assist an inquiry but must surely be confirmed before publication. It is clear that in my case, and many others, no such due care and regard has been followed.

The media owes it to our new democracy, to the freedoms we have struggled for and won, and to its own calling, to support the principles of professional journalism.

The media needs to get its house in order if it is to enjoy the trust and confidence of us all.

Mr Kasrils is not available for further comment as he is on an official visit to the People's Republic of China.

Attached is a letter from the Auditor-General's office.

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