

MEDIA RELEASE



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Department of Water Affairs and Forestry - Chief Directorate: Communication
Services

SA REVIEW OF WORLD COMMISSION ON DAMS REPORT:

CONCLUSIONS

Date: 25 July 2001

Minister Ronnie Kasrils yesterday committed himself and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to make amends to farm worker communities displaced from their homes nearly 40 years ago to make way for the construction of the Gariep and Van Der Kloof dams (then known as the Hendrik Verwoerd and PK Le Roux dams). At the close of an intensive two day review of the policies and practices governing the construction and operation of dams in South Africa, it was announced that the Department would meet their request that a memorial be built at the site to commemorate all those community members whose graves were submerged by the waters of the dams.

Earlier, 70 year old Mrs Sarah Mbalula, one of the remaining members of the community left destitute 40 years ago when the Orange river farms on which they worked were expropriated to make way for the dams, had spoken to the gathering of engineers, environmentalists, community and NGO members and government officials from South Africa and neighbouring countries. She told them that shortly after being evicted, she gave birth to her 11th child while living in a "no-man's land" strip of grassland alongside a road. Mrs. Mbalula and community facilitator Miriam Kibi told the meeting that the farmers concerned were compensated but that most of the farm workers were simply fired and told to leave their jobs and their homes. The families concerned, nearly 1200 people in all, lost most of their livestock because they no longer had any access to grazing land.

Minister Kasrils apologised unreservedly for the unthinking actions of the past. "While I cannot apologise for the actions of the past government, I can, as a fellow South African, express my profound regret for the inhumanity and lack of dignity with which you and your community were treated" said Kasrils in a message to Mrs. Mbalula and other members of her community.

“I will work with my Department – and will approach members of the farming community in the area to contribute – to ensure that a suitable memorial is erected at each dam” he promised. “While we cannot right the wrongs of the past, we can at least acknowledge them and ensure that they are never again repeated”, he said. Veteran officials of the Department who had worked on the dams as young professionals strongly associated themselves with Minister Kasrils statement.

The meeting, called to review the implications of the report of the World Commission on Dams was told that, in general, Government supported the intentions of the Commission’s recommendations. It was however believed that most of the guidelines were already reflected in Governments planning and environmental management policies. Where gaps were found, procedures would be reviewed and improved.

It was agreed that, as a follow-up, a group of stakeholders would work together with government on this review. It was also recommended that other SADC countries should engage in similar “multi-stakeholder” reviews.

“The key challenge is to put our policies and principles into practice. We will be measured by our acts and achievements, not by our intentions” said Minister Kasrils in his message.

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