

Statement by Ms. Sonjica, Minister for Water Affairs and Forestry of the Republic of South Africa

Ms Sonjica presented South African experiences in managing the conflicting water needs for agricultural production and ecosystems. She stressed that successful implementation of policies to deliver the international commitments on sustainable development must go hand in hand with empowering stakeholders to manage their natural resources.

Ms Sonjica explained the case of South African water legislation reform to illustrate South African experiences in water management. The South Africa's National Water Act of 1998 was guided by the following principle: "The quantity, quality and reliability of water required to maintain the ecological functions on which human depend shall be reserved so that the human use of water does not individually or cumulatively compromise the long term sustainability of aquatic and associated ecosystems." This led to the establishment of an "Ecological Reserve" to define the carrying capacity of ecosystems.

The legislation is implemented by means of a National Water Resource Strategy. The strategy is meant to facilitate the proper management of water resources. Implementation of South Africa's National Water Act of 1998 yielded some remarkable outputs. It helped the South African Government to meet basic needs of clean potable water, food and energy while taking into account all three sectors, water for food, people and ecosystems.

Ms Sonjica elaborated further details of the South African water policy:

- The planning and development of new dams, taking into consideration the requirements of the Ecological Reserve. Development of new dams is a critical strategy for dealing with droughts. Such dams must take into account the needs of ecology and local people.
- South Africa's revitalisation of the irrigation schemes integrating highly participatory and bottom-up approaches with the objective of ensuring ownership of the solutions and creating truly sustainable community development.
- Redistribution of water rights in the post-apartheid era
- Rain-water harvesting efforts through subsidizing water tanks
- Implementation of the 1998 National Water Act by developing, in agreement with various stakeholders, a management strategy at water catchment level.

Water management is a priority for South Africa. It is guided by the motto "Some, for all, forever, together": it is an approach that balances economic, social and environmental needs in the use of water. It is an approach that sees the protection of the aquatic ecosystem as integral to the sustainable production of food, the sustainable development of rural communities, the future of the country.