

- **Programme Director, Mr A. Madonsela;**
- **Executive Mayor of the Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Councillor Constance Mkhonto;**
- **Chairperson of the Mpumalanga House of Traditional Leaders, *Inkosi* S.E Mahlangu;**
- **Chairperson of the South African Council of Churches, Mr J.S Dlamini;**
- **Councillors present;**
- **Chief Director responsible for Environmental Services, Mr Sam Maluleka;**
- **National Co-ordinator of the Greenest Municipality Competition, Ms Kgomotso Mokgoko;**
- **Officials from the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism;**
- **Officials from the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs;**
- **Officials from different municipalities;**
- **Members of the Media;**
- **Distinguished guests;**
- **Ladies and gentlemen;**

Good Morning!

Programme director, I'm honoured to be part of this annual prestigious event, an event upon which the survival of mankind depends. I wish to indicate upfront that as a country we have made significant strides in recent years and as part of the global community to protect and conserve our environment, not only for ourselves but for generations to come.

I further wish to underscore without any fear of contradiction that the contribution made by Municipalities across the country has been very impressive when it comes to environment management.

Ladies and Gentlemen gone are the days when a green settlement area was representative of an upper class, affluent, upmarket suburb designated for the selected few whilst townships and villages became a symbol of a lifeless desert.

It is therefore important that we redress this negative legacy and continue to plant trees across all areas to beautify our communities and to this end, my department has allocated dedicated resources for the tree planting programme.

I would like to secure the indulgence of all Municipalities, schools, NGO's and private sector to join hands in ensuring that Mpumalanga and South Africa is counted amongst the nations of the world when it comes to environmental consciousness.

It is also important to underscore the economics of our greening programmes which are clearly articulated in our growth path with an emphasis on job creation opportunities. It is my considered view that South Africa has many competitive advantages, some of which remain under exploited including a wealth of biodiversity, sources of alternative energy, recycling projects and so forth. We therefore advise that incentive packages should be customized to encourage small businesses to enter the green economy.

It be noted also that the industrial policy action plan contains a number of concrete majors to support green economy initiatives. I argue that the private sector must be the key driver of investment and entrepreneurship in the green economy.

Programme Director we must however admit that there are inherent challenges in managing our environment.

CLIMATE CHANGE VERSUS CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE

One of the biggest challenges we are facing today, is the unfortunate advent of **climate change due to global warming**.

The world over, countries have awoken to this sudden reality, which if unattended, would have devastating consequences for present and future generations. There is an Indian saying which says, and I quote:

***“We do not inherit this land from our ancestors;
(but) we borrow it from our children.”***

This is further emphasised through the collective commitment we made in the *Bill of Rights* in our progressive Constitution. It emphasises that, and I quote:

***“Everyone has the right to an environment that
is not harmful to their health or well-being; and
to have the environment protected for the
benefit of present and future generations.”***

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, we owe it to future generations to conserve our surroundings – the biodiversity which we rely on for our own existence.

Our Constitution mandates us to ***“prevent pollution and ecological degradation; promote conservation; and to secure ecologically sustainable development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”***

The reality is, our own actions, whether right or wrong, justified or unjustified, have resulted in climate change. As a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol which calls on world countries to commit to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, we must actively play a critical role in realising that commitment.

As a party to the Kyoto Protocol, South Africa will therefore host the **17th Congress of Parties (COP17)** under the auspices of the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** from 28 November to 09 December 2011 in Durban.

It was during the inaugural meeting of the UNFCCC at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where 154 world nations, committed to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. Since then, the signatories have been meeting annually to assess the progress made in reducing the greenhouse gas emissions, to mitigate the consequences of climate change, and to agree on a legally binding protocol.

As a country, we are truly committed towards realising the aim of this UN Convention, hence we've set targets to reduce our emissions by 34 per cent by 2020 and by 42 per cent by 2025. Our responsibility at a municipal level, is therefore, to initiate and drive climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

OUTCOME-BASED PERFORMANCE APPROACH

Ladies and gentlemen; when the new government took office in 2009, President Jacob Zuma emphasised the need to do things differently, hence he introduced the **Outcome-based Approach** which aims for more effective and faster service delivery. In this regard, we draw our mandate from **Outcome 10**, which refers to **“Environmental Assets and Natural Resources that are well protected and continually enhanced.”**

Through this outcome, we are mandated to:

- 1. Enhance the quality and quantity of water resources (Output 1);***
- 2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, climate change impacts and improve air or atmospheric quality (Output 2);***
- 3. Ensure sustainable environmental management (Output 3)***
- 4. Protect our biodiversity (Output 4).***

Output 2 (Reduced greenhouse gas emissions, climate change impacts and improved air/atmospheric quality)

requires us to meaningfully contribute towards South Africa's aim of reducing greenhouse gases by 34 per cent and 42 per cent by 2020 and 2025 respectively.

It is therefore imperative that we must set targets that comply with Ambient Air Quality Standards, for example.

Output 3 on Sustainable Environmental Management requires us, to amongst others, ensure waste minimisation, improved collection, disposal and recycling by ensuring that the percentage of households with basic waste collection and disposal facilities increases from 50% to 80% by 2012.

It further mandates us to ensure that the percentage of landfill sites with permits increase to 80% by 2015, and that 25% percent of municipal waste gets diverted from landfill sites to recycling by 2012.

Output 4 on protected biodiversity requires us, to amongst others, ensure land protection and rehabilitation by increasing the percentage of land mass under conservation from 6% to 9%, and the hectares of land rehabilitated per year should increase from 624 hectares to 1000 hectares by 2014.

THE GREENEST MUNICIPALITY COMPETITION

Ladies and gentlemen, our gathering here this morning is therefore a sign of our collective commitment towards contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in order to ensure that our **environmental assets and natural resources are well protected and continually enhanced**. I believe that through an initiative such as **the Greenest Municipality Competition**, which is an element of the **National Waste Management Strategy**, we will collectively contribute towards realising the said outputs of Outcome 10.

It is evident that **the Greenest Municipality Competition** links to other global and national initiatives such as greening the nation and ensuring the reduction of greenhouse gases. The departure point of the competition is environmental education and awareness.

It encourages municipalities and people to play an active role in the moral regeneration of their communities, and to re-ignite pride and commitment in cleaning up their environments. Furthermore this competition improves the quality of life for all South Africans.

As our Constitution mandates us, **the Greenest Municipality Competition** is addressing environmental protection, social upliftment and economic growth. It enables municipalities to enhance the principles of sustainable development.

This is because the competition stresses **six (6) core elements**, namely:

- Waste Management;
- Energy Efficiency and Conservation;
- Water Management;
- Landscaping, tree planting and beautification;
- Public Participation and Community Empowerment; and
- Leadership and Institutional Arrangements.

It encourages all participating municipalities to establish the baseline for all the six (6) mentioned elements of the competition.

Waste Management:

In relation to waste management, municipalities are urged to demonstrate their ability to promote the ethos of the waste hierarchy, by promoting waste minimisation and re-use.

In this regard, the promotion and establishment of Buy-Back Centres should be a priority, as they would ensure the re-use and recycling of waste.

Energy Efficiency and Conservation:

Since our country has an over-reliance on coal-generated electricity, and given the dire shortage of it, it has become mandatory that we must conserve electricity. If we heed the call, we will cut down on our electricity consumption rate.

Street lighting is one area in which municipalities can play a major role – they should consider green street lighting which includes LED technologies, solar and retro-fitting with Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL), and the implementation of green building principles in new developments.

Landscaping, tree planting and beautification:

Through landscaping, tree-planting and beautification, municipalities can off-set their carbon foot print, since trees have a potential to create a carbon sink, thereby reduce the rate of global warming. We therefore encourage municipalities to ensure tree planting in the new RDP houses.

Water Management:

The use of water metering is critical in understanding the amount of water consumption, and in setting reduction targets.

Public participation and community empowerment:

Ladies and gentlemen; Public participation and community empowerment is critical in ensuring sustainability and ownership of the Greenest Municipality Programme. It is through this process, that members of the public become actively involved in the development and decision making regarding issues that affect or may affect them.

I therefore urge municipalities to use the Greenest Municipality Competition as a vehicle to deliver basic services and address issues of poverty through recycling initiatives.

I am proud to announce that the municipality that achieved first place will represent the province at the national event. Our Department will assist the winning municipality to prepare for the national evaluation.

I take this time to appreciate all those municipalities who took part in the 2010-2011 Greenest Municipality Competition. This can only mean that you are committed to our vision and mandate of ensuring the protection and continual enhancement of our **environmental assets and natural resources.**

To all those who did not win, by just entering the competition – a sign of your commitment, makes you a winner and a patriot for environmental preservation. Congratulations to you all.

Working together we can build better communities and fulfil our environmental Constitutional mandates, that is, to ***“prevent pollution and ecological degradation; promote conservation; and to secure ecologically sustainable development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”***

Let us all work together for Sustainable Development and a cleaner environment. Borrowing the words of former President Nelson Mandela, when he was receiving an Honourary Doctorate from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev on 19 September 1997, and I quote: **“Those who are ready to join hands can overcome the greatest challenges.”** End quote

Our generation's response to this challenge will be judged by history, for if we fail to meet it – boldly, swiftly, and together – we risk consigning future generations to an irreversible catastrophe.

No nation, however large or small, wealthy or poor, can escape the impact of climate change. Rising sea levels threaten every coastline. More powerful storms and floods threaten every continent. More frequent drought and crop failures breed hunger and conflict in places where hunger and conflict already thrive.

The security and stability of each nation and all peoples – our prosperity, our health, our safety – are in jeopardy. And the time we have to reverse this tide is running out.

And yet, we can reverse it. John F. Kennedy once observed that "Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man." It is true that for too many years, mankind has been slow to respond to or even recognize the magnitude of the climate threat. It is true of our own country and Province as well. We recognize that. But this is a new day. It is a new era. Let us embrace the change

We reiterate that every sector, every business entity, regardless of size, every sphere of government has a responsibility to contribute to this national objective of sustainable development.

Greening our environment is everybody's business!

I would therefore like to congratulate all winners and participants once again for all the efforts made and the efforts you will continue to make in the greening of our beautiful Province.

I thank you!