

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR M.N MOKOENA, MPL, DURING THE MPUMALANGA CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT HELD AT THE EHLANZENI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY OFFICE COMPLEX IN NELSPRUIT, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Thursday, 06 October 2011

- Programme Director, Honourable MEC for Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Administration, *Make Candith Mashego-Dlamini*;
- Her Worship, the Executive Mayor of the Mbombela Local Municipality, Councillor CL Dlamini;
- Honourable Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, *Mme Edna Molewa*;
- All MEC's present;
- Executive Mayors and Councillors present;
- King Mabhoko III, bayede traditional leaders, church leaders;
- The Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders Ikosi SE Mahlangu
- The Head of Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Dr Vusanani Dlamini;
- Other Heads of Departments present;
- CEOs of our Public Entities;
- Business sector representatives;
- Reverend Dlamini;
- Officials from Provincial Departments, National Departments, and municipalities;
- Members of the Media;
- Distinguished guests;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning!

Programme Director, we are honoured and ecstatic as a Department to host this important Climate Change Summit on behalf of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, a summit upon which the survival of mankind, all living organisms and the planet depend upon.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentleman may I start by securing your indulgence as I salute the fallen environmentalist, a great woman, an inspiration for many women across Africa, a magnificent visionary, that is the late Professor Wangari Maathai, a combative Nobel Peace Laureate who died last week at the age of 71.

So large is her legacy that she was described by the Leaders of the world in the Sunday Independent dated 2 October 2011, as a bridge between a simple village woman with whom she planted trees and the rulers of the world who sought her counsel and respected her brilliance and dedication.

Our girls have a true heroine to emulate. The trees, streams and birds she worked so hard to protect will forever sing her praises.

Africa and diaspora is giving you Mama Wangari Maathai a standing ovation as you exit planet earth, we are sure that you will greet heaven your new home by planting a tree.

Sithi ke hamba kahle qhawwe lendalo!

Honourable Minister;

One of our collective mandates, according to “**Section 24**” of our country’s progressive Constitution, is to ensure that, and I quote:-

“Everyone has the right- (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and

(b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that:-

(i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;

(ii) promote conservation; and

(iii) to secure ecologically sustainable development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”

However, the biggest challenge we are facing as a province, as a country, and the world over, is the advent of climate change which is now causing havoc due to global warming. The world over, countries have now awoken to this reality, which if unattended, would have devastating consequences for present and future generations.

We owe it to future generations to protect our environmental assets and natural resources which provide ecosystem goods and services we rely on for our own existence.

It is our only source of life in the form of the air we breathe; it is our only source of energy in the form of the food chain, amongst others.

As a signatory to the Kyoto protocol which calls on all the Nations of the world to **commit to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases** which is in the main include **carbon-dioxide**, **methane** and **nitrous oxide**, from our cars, energy generation and other forms of industrialisation processes.

We must actively play a critical role in realising the commitment of reducing these emissions.

Our Province, in particular the Highveld area, contributes a significant share to the country's greenhouse gas emissions profile by virtue of energy generation and other industries. As a result, The Highveld was declared as "The Highveld Priority Area (HPA)" by the Minister of Environmental Affairs on 23 November 2007 under the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act (AQA). The declaration necessitated the development of an Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) for the area, with the Department of Environmental Affairs as the lead agent. Major towns of our Province within the Highveld Priority Area include Witbank, Middelburg, Secunda, Standerton, and Balfour.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a common observation that these towns are often covered by a blanket of smoke in the mornings and late afternoons, which in turn affects the health and well-being of residents living in these towns. And while we acknowledge that much of this low-hanging smoke results from residential coal burning and veld fires, many heavy industries also operate in this area.

I have earlier on in this address alluded that we must actively play a critical role in realising the commitment of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Subsequent to the declaration of the Highveld Priority Area, it is pleasing to note that a number of steps have been taken to ensure a focused approach to the management of air quality in the Highveld. Some of these critical milestones include the establishment of the Highveld Priority Area Air Quality Officer's Forum (AQOF) – in which each municipality included in the Priority Area is represented.

Another milestone is the establishment of a Highveld Priority Area Multi-Stakeholder Reference Group (MSRG). These two stakeholder groups play critical roles in the development and implementation of a Highveld Priority Area Air Quality Management Plan.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as you are aware, South Africa will host the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 28 November to 9th December 2011 in Durban. This gathering is intended to come up with a legally binding agreement to enable world countries to reduce their levels of emissions drastically.

We hope for at least two positive outcomes:

- 1st: Making the green climate fund operational, meant to pay for developing countries climate change mitigation strategies
- 2nd: Ensuring the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol

The purpose of our provincial summit therefore, is to provide a platform of discussions to all stakeholders to pave the way for the Durban talks. Our intention through the summit is to, amongst others:

- Increase climate change communication and public awareness through outreach programmes;
- Build capacity among stakeholders and the broader public on matters of climate change mitigation;

- Serve as a platform in which our Province engages its stakeholders to request inputs towards responding to the impact of climate change.
- Making input as a Province and South Africa on the operationalisation of green climate fund but also comment on how best can the implementation of Kyoto protocol be optimised.

Our government regards *Climate Change* as one of the greatest threats to sustainable development. We believe that if unmitigated, has the potential to undo or undermine many of the positive advances made in meeting South Africa's own development goals and the Millennium Development Goals. Just as adapting to the impacts of *Climate Change* is a new challenge, it is also a shared challenge, and a shared responsibility.

Working together, we can do more to mitigate the impact of *Climate Change*.

Ladies and Gentleman, climate change poses challenges too big for just one country, one province or one community to solve. We must start to '*think globally, but act locally,*' hence we are in the process of commissioning the crafting of the Provincial Climate Change mitigation and response strategy. The Strategy will assist the Province in its decision and policy-making processes to both minimise the negative effects and to secure potentially beneficial opportunities that may arise from climate.

In the process of developing such a strategy key questions will have to be answered.

- What critical issues drive a response to climate change for the Province?
- How will the Province prioritise its response to climate change?
- What is the anticipated impact of these adaptation and mitigation responses?
- How do we maximise the opportunities that climate change presents to the Province?
- How are we as a Province going to contribute to the overall objective of the white paper which seeks to build the climate resilience of the country, its economy and its people and manage the transition to lower-carbon economy and society in a manner that simultaneously address South Africa's overriding National Priorities for sustainable development, job creation, improved public and environmental health, poverty eradication and addressing inequality.

No player, therefore, can single handedly achieve all of these noble objectives. We need a coalition of green conscious activists in every street, village, suburb, sector of society and sphere of government.

We appreciate the contribution made by private partners such as *Nedbank*, which have reacted positively to our request to contribute towards greening our province, given that it is proven that trees assist in trapping the greenhouse gas emissions.

They have contributed R20 000 towards the purchase of trees, our plan for this contribution is to plant 1060 trees in new township developments such as RDP Housing projects, clinics, and community centres. We therefore call on other partners to join in this initiative to save tomorrow, today.

I must also seize this opportunity to acknowledge the sponsors of this event namely: Sasol, SAPPI, Optimum Colliery, GIZ, Ehlanzeni District Municipality and MEGA, without whose support this summit would not be possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we can “save tomorrow today” by starting to act responsibly now. Our Government has taken the first step by committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% in 2020 and 42% by 2025, and these targets can only be achieved if each sector of the economy commits to the targets.

Honourable Minister; ladies and gentlemen;

Let me now share with you some of the activities we have embarked on as part of the Provincial build-up to *COP17*:

- Our Department’s Directorate of Environmental Awareness and Education has embarked on the development and implementation of a ***Climate Change Literacy Programme***, which saw 54 *Climate Change Literacy Programme* sessions being facilitated.
- These sessions were targeting community structures and schools throughout our 18 local municipalities. We also conducted contests for a provincial song, speech, poster and poetry on creating awareness on *Climate Change*.

- We have also developed a manual for this programme, which is a capacity building resource for Environmental Officers in our Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, and for Regional Environmental Education Co-ordinators in the Department of Education.
- During environment-oriented commemorative days, we managed to facilitate 454 events and reached nearly 80 000 stakeholders.
- During our *Tree planting and Greening Programme*, we continued to disseminate information brochures on 'how to plant and care for trees.' In the current financial year we planned to plant 5000 trees, I am happy to report that we have already exceeded our target and planted 5514 trees throughout the province, and we have not even passed the halfway mark yet. Apart from all the values that trees provide us such as moderating climate change, improving air quality, conserving water, providing food and medicine, they have carbon sequestration ability as well. We must continue to plant more trees to mitigate this unfortunate phenomenon.
- We conducted Climate Change Road-shows in all our 18 local municipalities, where we targeted mayors, councillors, municipal managers, housing sections, IDP sections, spatial development sections, community services, economic development sections and risk management sections.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that this gathering is of people who have 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.**

This is an Outcome that we must see come true, as directed by the Presidency and the Premier of our Province Mr DD Mabuza who has already issued an injunction in his 2011 State of the Province that our Economic trajectory must be understood within the context of the sustainability agenda.

I must indicate upfront that climate change mitigation and response strategy is not necessarily rocket science, each one of us can contribute by doing basics such as:

- **Watch those watts** – The golden rule when it comes to electricity, if you are not using it, SWITCH IT OFF!!
- Remember the three R's namely: **REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE** – In this way we will help to conserve energy, reduce pollution and greenhouse gases from resource extraction and subsequently help to fight global climate change, or at least minimise the rate of the change.
- **Transport:** 20% of greenhouse gas emissions come from the transport sector, the use of public transport, and joining a carpool will go a long way in helping to reduce emissions.
- Greening your **own environment** is the first step.

I will continue to emphasise as I did in all the green events of this nature that 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 were symbols of lifeless deserts. It is therefore, important that we redress this negative legacy as part of our climate change sustainable management discourse. At this point, I wish to indicate 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 the generations to come.

I further commend the impressive contribution made by municipalities across the country in sustaining and managing our environment.

Through campaigns such as *the Greenest Municipality Competition*, we will contribute meaningfully towards environmental sustainability. 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.

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

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.”*

As I conclude, I wish to reiterate that every sphere of Government, every sector, every business entity regardless of size and every community has a responsibility to contribute to this national and global objective of sustainable development and the focus of our discussion over the next two days will be to explore among other issues new ways of economic growth without increased resource use and emission.

We need to accept and face the sacrifices and changes required to move to cleaner energy sources but also cease the economic opportunities which come with these changes.

Let us all work together for sustainable development and a cleaner environment.

Hope our deliberations in the next two days will take us a step closer to our climate change targets.

I thank you!