

Ladies and gentlemen;

You will all agree that the biggest ever common challenge we are facing as a province, as a country, and the Planet Earth, 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 collectively owe it to future generations to protect our environmental assets and natural resources, which provide us with eco-system 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; it is our only source of our health in the form of medicinal plants, amongst others.

It is thus significant that we must, as different stakeholders, *Work Together, to Save Tomorrow Today!*

As you are aware, South Africa will host the 17th Conference of Parties, commonly known as COP17, in Durban later this month from the 28th until the 9th of December. The main objective of the conference as you are aware, is for world countries to agree on a legally binding agreement aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while at the same time, agreeing on ways to mitigate the impact of climate change and global warming.

Under the theme, *“Working Together: Saving Tomorrow Today,”* discussions at the conference will seek to advance the implementation of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, as well as the Bali Action Plan agreed at COP13 in Indonesia in 2007, and the Cancun Agreements reached at COP 16 in Mexico last December. The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in Japan on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005, sets binding targets for 37 industrialised countries and the European community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of five (5) percent against 1990 levels by 2012.

This is after the recognition that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of the greenhouse gas emissions as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activities, hence the Kyoto Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

Furthermore, the Bali Action Plan advocates for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by between 25 and 40 percent by 2020. When the Parties met in Cancun in Mexico last year, they amongst others agreed:

- to commit to a **maximum temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius** above pre-Industrial levels, and to consider lowering that maximum to 1.5 degrees in the near future;
- to make fully operational by 2012, a **technology mechanism** to boost the innovation, development and spread of new climate-friendly technologies;
- to establish a **Green Climate Fund** to provide financing to projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing countries via thematic funding windows;

As a Province, we just recently convened stakeholders interested in the sustainability of our environment, to a Provincial Summit on Climate Change which was a build up to the Durban talks. This gave all stakeholders an opportunity to contribute to the national position, which will be presented at the summit.

At the end of the two (2) day summit, we amongst others, collectively agreed:

- To mitigate our climate change impact through reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- To co-operate with affected sectors such as agriculture, water, mining, forestry, local authorities, industry, energy, transport, to reduce the impact.

- To ensuring the conservation of biodiversity in the province;
- To educate and create awareness to establish programmes and projects in partnership with all stakeholders to respond to the challenge of climate change;
- To promoting the development of a green economy through the implementation of the waste management hierarchy, cleaner technologies and development mechanisms;
- To ensure the contribution of ecosystem goods and services to the social and economic development of the Province; and
- To increase the contribution of a low carbon footprint in the economy of the province through the promotion of renewable energies and the creation of sustainable livelihoods.

Ladies and gentlemen;

The Declaration recognises that all levels of government, communities and sectors, play a key role in our collective response to the challenge of climate change, and publicly demonstrates our collective commitment to *Work Together in order to Save Tomorrow, Today!*

Moving forward to COP17, the National Government has released what is called the *National Climate Change Response White Paper*, which will be our basis during the Durban talks. Our government's response in this regard is anchored round two objectives, namely:

- To effectively manage inevitable climate change impacts through interventions that build and sustain South Africa's social, economic and environmental resilience and emergency response capacity; and
- To make a fair contribution to the global effort to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that avoids dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system within a timeframe

that enables economic, social and environmental development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

I should also mention that our response is guided by the principles set out in our progressive Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the National Environmental Management Act, the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Our government regards Climate Change as one of the greatest threats to sustainable development. We believe that if unmitigated, it 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 gentlemen;

As the Province of Mpumalanga, we are not left behind. We've started to play our part and will soon begin a process to craft our *Provincial Climate Change Mitigation and Response Strategy* and the *Bio-diversity Vulnerability Response Strategy*. These strategies will assist us in decision and policy-making processes, to both minimise the negative effects and to secure potentially beneficial opportunities that may arise. We will however ensure that our strategies are in line with the national strategy on climate change mitigation in terms of the *National Climate Change Response White Paper*.

Our Department has started the *School Climate Change Literacy Programme*, and through this programme, we believe that we will continue to lay a firm foundation to raise awareness on the negative consequences which Climate

Change will bring about. These includes amongst others, the changing weather pattern we are already experiencing, which according to scientists, may result in irregular rainy seasons which may lead to flooding. As you are aware, flooding is always associated with the risk of diseases such as malaria, which will threaten our health status. Our food security chain would also be affected – leading to food shortage and price increases, and the people who will be adversely affected are the poor and the vulnerable.

Ladies and gentlemen;

The solution to mitigating climate change, is investment of more resources in green or renewable energy in the form of solar energy, wind or hydro power.

It is said that a journey of a thousand miles, begins with the first step, and our country's first step is a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020 and 42% by 2025. However it should be noted that these targets can only be achieved if each sector of the economy commits to the targets.

I'm therefore honoured and privileged to address this, the 14th *Ecolink Annual Searnat Rainwater Harvesting Conference*, hosted under the theme: **"Scaling up Rainwater Harvesting Innovation for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption"**

I'm humbled because of Ecolink's commitment to address the need for local water resources development and management for food production and poverty reduction. Established in 1985 by Dr Sue Hart, Ecolink is now a leading implementer of Water Harvesting initiatives and in collaboration with the Southern and Eastern Africa Rainwater Network (Searnat). It continues to provide support and training to our disadvantaged communities, hence we acknowledge it as a critical partner is bettering the lives of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen;

Given that South Africa uses a comparatively high percentage of its available water, there is growing concern, bordering on general consensus, that the country could experience a water crisis. This implies the need to adapt the management of this resource progressively as global climate change progresses, in order to maintain optimal levels of both resource protection and beneficial use of water for society.

The close interconnectedness between climate and the hydrological cycle means that water resources will be impacted by climate change, and the changing weather patterns will have an effect on both the quantity and quality of water resources available for the functioning of ecosystems, as well as for human survival. With water demand expected to increase and an increasing variability in rainfall, adaptation mechanisms need to be in place to cope with future water availability.

We therefore appreciate your initiatives, in teaching our people to harvest rain water, given that water is a scarce resource within our country.

Rainwater harvesting, which is the focus of this conference, is therefore an important tool for mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. For optimal success, multi-stakeholder participation and cross-sector collaboration is critical.

Ten (10) litres of rain harvested water today, is 10 litres of water less needed tomorrow.

The significance of rainwater harvesting in South Africa, is often advocated strongly, hence the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recommended in its Fourth Assessment Report, that rainwater harvesting, water storage and

conservation techniques should be expanded as it is considered the most efficient tools for climate adaptation in the Water Sector.

As a result, the National Climate Change Response White Paper which was released last month, has proposed the following:

- That adaptation strategies should include conserving agricultural practices including water harvesting and crop rotation;
- Prioritising technologies for climate change adaptation within rural areas, including low water-use irrigation systems; improved roll-out of rainwater harvesting strategies; and drought-resistant seed varieties;
- That the Water Conservation and Demand Management Flagship Programme should include the accelerated provision of rainwater harvesting tanks in rural and low-income settlements, which forms part of the National Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Strategy.

With that in mind, it is my pleasure, on behalf of the Premier, the Executive and the people of Mpumalanga, to welcome all delegates, to this, the 14th *Ecolink Searnet Rainwater Harvesting Conference* in our province. We believe that your deliberations during the duration of your conference, will be on how best you can assist our government in its quest to provide a better life for all. We believe that you will come out with strategies that will assist us to better deal with our scarce resource, that is water, and how best to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Working together we can *Save Tomorrow Today* and fulfil our environmental Constitutional mandates, that of *“preventing pollution and ecological degradation; promoting conservation; and securing ecologically sustainable*

development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”

I wish you fruitful engagement during your conference.

I thank you!