

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR M.N MOKOENA, MPL, DURING THE  
CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY AT KRIEL**

**Friday, 24 June 2011**

Programme Director, Mr S.P Mahlangu;

The Executive Mayor of the Hosting Municipality, Councillor Speedy Mashilo;

The Executive Mayor from Emalahleni Local Municipality Councillor Salome Sithole

Honourable Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Mme Rejoice Mabudafhasi;

Xstrata's General Manager for Environment and Community Development, Mr N. Dooge;

Councillors present

Chief Director for Environmental Services in our Department, Mr Sam Maluleka;

Officials from the Department (*the dedet*) and from the Ministry of Water and Environment Affairs;

Officials from the Nkangala District Municipality;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Comrades and compatriots;

Ladies and gentlemen;

**Good Morning**

Programme Director, I am honoured and ecstatic to be hosting this important event on behalf of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, an event upon which the survival of mankind depends upon. I bring with me warm greetings from our Honourable Premier Mr DD Mabuza who has already issued an injunction in his State of the Province Address that our economic growth trajectory must be understood within the context of the sustainability agenda.

If we take cue from this point raised by the Honourable Premier the Environmental Awareness, Education and Management must be at the core our sustainable development.

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 the generations to come.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, I will continue to emphasise as I did in all the celebrations of this magnitude 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 and encourage all our municipalities to take part in the Greenest Municipality Competition. The departure point of this competition is environmental education and awareness. It enables municipalities to enhance the principles of sustainable development.

At this point, Programme Director allow me to once again congratulate all municipalities who participated in the Provincial Greenest Municipality Competition particularly Steve Tshwete Local Municipality for the First Prize, and runners up which are Nkomazi and Goven Mbeki Local Municipalities who got Second and Third Prizes respectively.

This can only mean, Madam Deputy Minister that our Provincial Municipalities are committed to our vision and mandate of ensuring the protection and continual enhancement of our environmental assets and natural resources.

Ladies and gentlemen, 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.”*

It is in line with this mandate that we must continue to raise awareness around environmental issues. This year’s celebration of the World Environment Day focuses on our forests; hence the International theme for the year is **“Forests - Nature at Your Service.”** The theme basically underscores the variety of life-sustaining services that forests provide to us all, and calls on us to take action to protect these resources and move towards a green economy.

However our message here at home, is a call to **“Save Tomorrow, Today.”** This we do in the spirit of the **Bill of Rights** which 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.”*

If we all commit to do just that, we would at least be counted as environmental pioneers who cared for future generations. Let us all stand up and be counted.

As you are aware, our own actions as human beings, through industrialisation, have led to the depletion of the ozone layer, which has unfortunately resulted in global warming. The world over, countries have awoken to this sudden reality, which if unattended, would have devastating consequences for present and future generations.

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 **17<sup>th</sup> 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. This gathering is intended to come up with a legally binding agreement to force world countries to reduce their level of emissions drastically.

As a province and country, we are committed to ensuring that we mitigate the effects of global warming, hence we are in the process of crafting the Provincial *Climate Change Mitigation and Response Strategy*. This we will do in consultation with all interested stakeholders.

Our commitment as a Department is to also plant 5000 trees across the province, in addition to the 13 780 trees we planted in the previous financial year in collaboration with interested parties. We thus call upon other businesses to follow in the footsteps of Xstrata and other companies, who have a vested interest in conserving our environment for the sustainable use of current and future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen; the World Environment Day was commemorated for the first time on the 5th June 1972. It is through this day that world countries aim to personalise environmental issues and to enable everyone to realise not only their responsibility, but also their power to become agents for change in support of sustainable and equitable development.

To show our commitment as a country, we have gone a step further to celebrate the month of June as Environment month. During this month, we continued to advocate partnership among all stakeholders.

We are all aware that the air quality around this district, remains our priority in terms of pollution management, hence we continue to monitor the Highveld Pollutant Priority Area. We will very soon finalise the Air Quality Management Plan for this area.

## How can we save Tomorrow Today?

Ladies and gentlemen;

We can “**save tomorrow today**” by stating to act responsibly now. Our government has taken the first step by committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020 and 42% by 2025.

We continue to plant trees to mitigate this unfortunate phenomenon, amongst others. However government cannot do this alone. Each one of us has a critical role to play. As we celebrate the 2011 World Environment Month, let us consider implementing the following:

- **Watch those watts** - the golden rule when it comes to electricity; If you're not using it, switch it off;
- **Reduce-Reuse-Recycle** - if we apply our minds to practice Reduce-Reuse-Recycle, we will help conserve energy, reduce pollution and greenhouse gases from resource extraction, manufacturing and disposal and subsequently help to fight global climate change, or at least minimize the rate of the change;
- **Transport** - 20% of greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation sector. Use public transport or join or start a carpool;
- **Consumer matters and food** - don't forget to take your own re-usable bag when shopping or otherwise re-use your plastic shopping bag. Buy locally grown and produced foods as it will save fuel and keep money within your community;
- **Save water** - municipal water systems require a lot of energy to pump, purify and distribute water to households, and saving water, especially hot water, can lower greenhouse gas emissions;
- **Plant trees** - apart from all the values that trees provide us such as moderating climate change, improving air quality, conserving water, providing habitat and habitat material for man and wildlife, providing food, providing medicine and so forth, they have carbon sequestration ability as well.

- Our advice is to plant indigenous trees as they are in harmony with their environment and form a crucial role in the ecology.

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 objective of sustainable development.

**Protecting our Environment should be everyone's business every day.**

Madam Deputy Minister, may I secure your approval to hand over not just a gift but a sustainable gift which is home brewed. I am honoured to present to you a Climate Change Literacy Programme Manual as our contribution to the COP 17 build up activities.

Speaking under correction, I have been advised that we are the First Province to come up with such a manual targeting local schools and communities. We are in the process of translating the manual to the mostly spoken languages in the Province.

I will also hand some of the copies to the Executive Manager of Nkangala District, Emalahleni Local Municipality and Xstrata.

Ladies and Gentleman, no Nation, however large and small, wealthy or poor, can escape the impact of Climate Change.

One of the unknown author from the East once observed, and I quote **"Our problems are manmade, therefore they may be solved by man."**

*I thank you!*