

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR MIKE MULLER ON BEHALF OF THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL WATER WEEK AT THE JOHANNESBURG WATER FESTIVAL ON 23 MARCH 2004 AT ZOO LAKE**

Honourable guests –

Representatives of Eskom, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address you at this event for National Water Week 2004, and to be hosted by your community, and partners.

Once again we have come together to celebrate water, and to celebrate the delivery of Government. Yes, today we celebrate 10 years of freedom and democracy in our country. We celebrate our progress that we have jointly achieved, people and Government working together for the past 10 years. Yes we have strived over the past ten years to ensure that through water, a better life for all has been gained, and that through water, we have taken great strides to wash away poverty. Indeed Water is Washing away Poverty .

This year's National Water Week celebrations co-incides with our Ten Year Celebrations of our democratic government. We have come a long way in the past 10 years. In 1994, about 14 million of our people did not have access to safe clean drinking water and approximately 21 million of our people did not have access to a basic level of sanitation.

This year we will celebrate the 10 millionth person receiving access to water since 1994. Yes, this Government has shown it is possible to create a better life for all our people, especially the poorest of the poor. For the 10 million, there is no more carrying heavy water containers long distances, no more taking water from polluted rivers and streams, no more walking long distances up and down hills, no diseases because of polluted water, no more deaths from crocodile attacks. Yes we are creating a better life for all our people. To date, Free Basic Water services are being provided by 87% of local governments; and this basic level of service is reaching:

- 64,4% of the national population; and
- 49,4% of the poor population.

But we must remember that our work is not completed. We must make sure that those who have not yet received water and sanitation services, receive them in the shortest possible time. Your Government is saying we are working towards ensuring that by 2008 those of our people that are not yet receiving water will have access to clean water and that by 2010 all our people will have access to basic sanitation. Our Government is determined to eradicate poverty and to provide a better life for all and to improve the lives of all citizens, and our future generations.

The annual celebration of National Water Week presents us with a unique opportunity to consider the important role that water as a precious resource, plays in our daily lives. This week's festival, organized by Johannesburg Water, is focused on educational and fun activities. It challenges our young people to enjoy themselves and participate in a number of events centered on the theme of water as a source of life. It is a very appropriate way to celebrate the gift of water and the many different ways it is enriching our lives.

However, ladies and gentlemen, the image of water as a source of fun and enjoyment can never be separated from the very important call to treat this valuable commodity with respect and appreciation.

I believe all of us are extremely grateful for the good rains that have fallen over the greater part of our country, including the City of Johannesburg, in recent weeks. In some areas the rain has broken a long and arduous drought that brought severe hardship and misery to communities, to animals and to crops. A few good days of rain can restore the spirit of hope and optimism that is so characteristic of South Africans.

But as we celebrate the rain we should never forget the fact that South Africa is, indeed, a water stressed country. We do not have a surplus of water and neither can we afford to abuse our precious water resources. A few good thunderstorms or rising dam levels can never be invitations to anybody to waste water or to underestimate its value. Water may be a free gift from heaven, but it can never be cheap.

It is for this reason, ladies and gentlemen, that I want to commend Johannesburg Water for the initiative it has taken to organise these water festival activities where the emphasis is on conservation and the responsible consumption of water.

Johannesburg Water has, since its inception in 2001, grown into one of the leading water utilities in South Africa. It is an organisation that is of immense strategic importance, not only to the more than 3 million consumers it is serving within the City of Johannesburg, but also to the entire country.

Johannesburg is the most important commercial and industrial hub on the entire continent of Africa. To South Africans, and indeed to the rest of the world, it is the symbol of commerce, of trade and industry and of high technology. But it is also a vibrant African city with a pulsating community life; a city of entertainment, of arts and culture and of sporting excellence.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is apparent that a city of the size and status of Johannesburg requires a solid reliable infrastructure to keep it functioning and to attract an increasing number of investors and visitors to its core. One of the key factors for foreign companies considering investment in a country or region, is the quality of the available infrastructure – the reliability of electricity and water supplies, the road network, public transport, education and health systems. These are also of critical importance to prospective tourists and visitors to South Africa.

The City of Johannesburg is keenly aware of this and to meet this challenge it has budgeted for capital expenditure of around R1 billion per annum over the next three years. I believe this is a sound investment in the future of South Africa's principal city.

In this process Johannesburg Water is contributing significantly to raise the profile of the city as an attractive destination for both investors and tourists. The water quality in Johannesburg is comparable, if not better, than that of any international city anywhere in the world.

However, ladies and gentlemen, investment in infrastructure also brings significant benefits to the quality of life of the people of Johannesburg themselves. Every new road that we build, every new streetlight we switch on and every new water connection we make means that we are delivering on our contract with the people to ensure a better life for all.

Our democratic government is fully aware of the importance of water to the broad development of communities. In September 2000 President Thabo Mbeki announced a

comprehensive programme to deliver free, essential water to every household in the country. Over the past three and a half years we have made significant progress in our efforts to bring quality water within easy reach of every South African.

We are about to celebrate the first decade of democratic government in South Africa. I am proud to say that we have connected more people to clean water and sanitation in the past ten years than what has been achieved in the decades under apartheid rule.

Johannesburg Water is a crucial link in this service delivery chain. It has set itself a vision to become the leading water utility in South Africa and to provide all people of Johannesburg with access to a quality water and sanitation service. Already it is meeting the national commitment to deliver a monthly supply of 6 000 litres of quality, free water to every household.

One of the major issues that had to be addressed since January 2001, when Johannesburg Water took over the responsibility of water and sanitation delivery, is that of aging infrastructure and massive volumes of water that are getting lost within a leaking system. In Soweto alone it was estimated that more than 7 billion litres of water are unaccounted for every month because of leaks in pipes and other parts of the reticulation network.

To counter this Johannesburg Water introduced Operation Gcin'amanzi, a R450-million investment in new infrastructure including mainline pipes and new connections into every household. I recently visited the construction sites in Phiri and I was favourably impressed with the progress that has been made to provide a water delivery service of the highest quality to communities in Soweto. This programme will eventually be extended to the rest of the Greater Johannesburg area.

Ladies and gentlemen, a crucial part of our campaign is to heighten the awareness about the importance of water among the broad population. This Water Festival is an important element of this education campaign. Over the next few days the people of Johannesburg will be able to participate in a wide range of exciting activities ranging from a dragon boat display, to a family fun walk to entertaining water music festivals. At the same time this Zoo Lake area will host a number of exhibitions and public education initiatives that will highlight the importance of water and challenge the creativity of our youth. In recent weeks Johannesburg Water has

run a number of competitions aimed at different age groups to raise water awareness amongst our youth and the winners will be announced in due course.

I want to congratulate the organizers of this Water Festival and I trust that it will make a significant contribution to our national effort to treat our strategic natural resources with respect and to utilize it productively.

I now have the pleasure to declare the Johannesburg Water Festival 2004 officially open.

Thank you! Amanzi Ayimpilo!