

**SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATION AT MBANGWANA THUSONG SERVICE CENTRE IN TONGA, NKOMAZI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.**

**Friday, 04 June 2010**

Programme Directors, Councillor Getrude Kubhayi and Mr Petrus Makhabane;

Executive Mayor of Nkomazi Municipality, Councillor Johan Mavuso;

*BuKhosi ba-kaMahlalela;*

Councillors present;

The Head of Department, Mr Rabeng Tshukudu;

Officials from the Department and other government Departments;

Learners and educators from Mbangwane Primary School;

Distinguished guests;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

We meet here this morning, as our country and the world are facing the critical number one environmental challenge of climate change. This has been brought about by the ongoing pollution of our environment by greenhouse gases as a result of industrialisation and emissions from our vehicles. For example, according to the leading economic forecaster, Global Insight, the number of vehicles on global roads has reached one billion, with predictions that it could reach 3 billion by 2035.

This has therefore made climate change, a crucial challenge facing all humanity – since our existence depend on the correct actions that we take now. The advent of climate change poses an enormous threat to economic growth and sustainable development – which are some of the priority areas of our government.

Predictions are that up to 70 million people and up to 30 percent of Africa's coastal infrastructure could face the risk of flooding by 2080 due to the rising sea levels. This would in turn result in rampant and uncontrollable diseases. Food security will also be severely affected due to unpredictable weather patterns which we are already experiencing, and this will result in serious shortage of agricultural products. Predictions are that some parts of Africa would experience a reduction in agricultural yields of more than 50 percent by 2050, as a result.

It is therefore critical on our part, that we must start to act responsibly towards our endangered environment, in order to ease the impact of climate change. The celebration of *World Environment Day* this morning, is therefore aimed at raising awareness about this near catastrophic eventuality; and to urge each one of us to start taking serious actions towards conserving the environment for future generations. We owe it to them to preserve what is left off the environment.

This year's celebration, under the theme: *"Many Species, One Planet, One Future,"* echoes our urgent call to conserve the diversity of life on our planet. Millions of people and millions of species all share the same planet, and only together, can we enjoy a safer and more prosperous future, if we safe our environment from degradation.

We have a collective Constitutional mandate, to ensure that *"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."* The Bill of Rights in 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."*

Ladies and gentlemen, the 2007 State of South Africa's Environment Report highlights serious concerns about the rapid deterioration of our environment. With our present approach to development, we have caused the clearing of much of the original forest; drained half of the world's wetlands; depleted three quarters of all fish stocks; and emitted enough heat-trapping gases to keep our planet warming for centuries to come. We have put our foot on the accelerator, making species extinctions occur at up to 1000 times the natural rate. As a result, we are increasingly risking the loss of the very foundation of our own survival.

As this year has also been declared the **International Year of Biodiversity**, we advocate for partnerships among all stakeholders, who share a common vision to preserve our environment for the benefit of future generations. During this year, we are encouraged to celebrate life on earth, and the value of biodiversity in our lives by protecting it against degradation. Through this all-significant world-wide campaign, we aim to conscientise people of the world to realise not only their responsibility, but also their power to become agents for change in support of sustainable and equitable development.

*World Environment Day* which has been commemorated on 5 June since 1972, is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and encourages political attention and action. Our government is the signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, which focuses on compelling world countries to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. In responding to this challenge, the national government plans to release a National Climate Change Policy and White Paper by the end of 2010. Our province is already doing its part by putting much effort on significantly reducing pollution levels, especially in the Highveld area. To this effect, our Department has committed to complete the Air Quality Management Plan for the Highveld Air Pollution Priority Area and the Centralised Integrated Waste Management facility by the end of this year.

With the Air Quality Management Plan, we intend to set targets to gradually reduce air pollutant levels especially in the Highveld area, which is a national priority area. This will further contribute towards developing the Provincial Climate Change Mitigation Strategy, intended to ease the effects of global warming we are currently experiencing. And in our quest to restore our environment and to keep our province green, we will during this financial year plant 91 thousand, 473 trees across the province.

Ladies and gentlemen, given that our developing country still relies heavily on coal, which is one of the biggest air pollutants, for the production of energy in the form of electricity, the national government is in the process of developing the **National Green Economy Strategy**. This strategy seeks to come up with alternatives for energy generation in order to combat the negative effects of climate change by focusing on the possible creation of green job opportunities across many sectors of the economy.

The use of green energy in the form of solar panels will reduce reliance on electricity generated from coal, thus contributing positively towards reducing the current levels of greenhouse gas emissions. It is therefore much critical for us as government, to direct more time and resources to this aspect of the green economy. In fulfilling this commitment, the national government has already developed a framework for the rollout of one million solar water heaters by 2014 across South Africa. This project is intended to benefit mainly low income earners, and will at the same time improve their quality of life.

It is predicted that this initiative could also contribute towards job creation by creating some 100 000 jobs across the value chain, including installation and maintenance of systems.

We also urge all of you to invest in green energy initiatives, which have both the benefit of saving you a lot of your hard-earned money in the long run, and also saving our environment and planet from extinction. This will result in less emission of greenhouse gases – the benefit thereof being cleaner air to breathe, and fewer diseases to worry about.

As we celebrate *World Environment Day*, let us carefully consider the actions each one of us must take, and then address ourselves to our common task of preserving all life on Earth. We can employ our individual and collective power to stem the tide of extinction. More importantly, the aim of *World Environment Day* is to challenge us to consider taking the following actions, as we go about enjoying our existence:

- **Respect:** With respect comes ownership and responsibility to use all resources wisely;
- **Re-think:** We need to re-think how our daily actions impact on the environment and we should strive to promote environmental considerations and environmental ethics in the management of our lives;
- **Reduce:** We must live the word ‘reduction’ in the broadest sense – reduce driving, buying clothing, reduce paper, reduce water usage;
- **Re-use:** Use an item more than once;
- **Recycle:** Recycling prevents useful material resources being wasted; it reduces the consumption of raw materials and reduces energy. Recycling has the potential for job creation and is a viable alternative to informal salvaging at landfills;
- **Rands and Cents:** If you’re not buying recycled goods, you’re not recycling optimally. Buying recycled products also save resources. Remember that purchasing practices in general, can affect most environmental issues – either favourably or unfavourably according to the environmental awareness and attitudes the public.

Ladies and gentlemen, in six (6) days from now, our country will stage the first ever FIFA World Cup soccer tournament on the African soil. It's all systems go to host the world during the month-long soccer spectacular. As one of the host provinces, we must be ready to receive our visitors and afford them an opportunity to experience Africa's humanity. However the hosting of an event of such magnitude, comes with its challenges. This will result in the generation of more waste and consumption of more energy. Our collective responsibility is therefore, to ensure that we enforce waste recycling and provide a platform for the use green energy.

As I close, according to the report published by United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, temperatures could rise by more than 6 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, if appropriate actions are not taken to mitigate this. It warns that a rise of 4 degrees Celsius would be enough to wipe out hundreds of species; bring extreme food and water shortages in vulnerable countries, and cause catastrophic floods that would displace hundreds of millions of people. And when that happens, it is the poor who will be the hardest hit. Act positively now, to secure the future for all those who've lend this world to us.

As U.S. quotation anthropologist, Terri Guillemets, puts it, *"The past can't see you, but the future is listening."*

The future is our children, those already born and the unborn, who are watching and scrutinising every step that we take. It is unfortunate that they do not have a voice to reprimand us - for they believe in us, hoping that we will not fail them. I believe that none of us want to go down the history books, as having been exterminators of all time. We must always remember that our environment, which is a God-given and priceless treasure, is irreplaceable.

If we let this treasure to become extinct, it will be lost forever, and our children and future generations will be immeasurably poorer.

*“Many Species, One Planet, One Future”* – that is our collective responsibility!

**Working together we can do more** to save our planet from extinction.

*Ngiyabonga!*