

**Deputy Minister Mabudafhasi's speech for the Celebration of the World Day to
Combat Desertification at Machubeni, Eastern Cape**

20 June 2007

Programme Director Honourable MEC for Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism, Mr M Sogoni Honourable Executive Mayor of Chris Hani District Municipality, Councillor M Sigabi Honourable Mayor of Emalahleni Local Municipality, Councillor N Lali Officials from various departments Members of the community School learners Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to start by reminding you that it was Fathers' Day this past Sunday. Lucky fathers received gifts for being pillars of strength to their families. Renewal of love in any family is a good omen. It sustains relationships for many years to come.

Now the question begging to be asked is: Do we have a special relationship with our environment? We derive many benefits from the environment everyday. This ranges from what we eat, dress, means of our transport and the origin of anything you can imagine can be traced back to the environment as a source. Our moral obligation is to take care of the environment ? a simple thank you gesture which all of us can do.

It was not by mistake that the United Nations declared this day as the World Day to Combat Desertification. This decision was made in order to raise awareness on the negative impacts that desertification and land degradation have on human beings and the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we celebrate the World Day to Combat Desertification we should ask ourselves a question as big commercial companies, individuals, communities and government to check if we are doing enough to protect the environment. This year's theme is 'Desertification and Climate Change - One Global Challenge.' How are we contributing to reverse the effects of desertification and global warming?

Ladies and gentlemen desertification and climate change are the world's most alarming

causes of environmental degradation. Desertification and climate change are interlinked in multiple ways. They represent two faces of the global environmental challenge of the 21st century.

Climate change has an influence on desertification through its impact on dryland soil and vegetation, on the hydrological cycle in drylands, and ultimately on human land use in that 40% of the land area of the globe classified as dryland. A synergistic approach is therefore the most effective way to tackle them. Desertification is a significant problem for South Africa, threatening not only our ecological integrity, but the wellbeing of our people. It impacts most severely on the poorest of the poor. Current climate change trends threaten to exacerbate those social and environmental problems, while desertification plays a significant role in increasing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing carbon sinks. Many common solutions, rooted in sound sustainable development practices, are needed to adapt to climate change and address desertification.

Our climate is changing and the signs are evident. Let's accept the responsibility and take action today to make a different tomorrow. In our everyday life we can help by making changes, small or big to help protect our health, safety and our environment.

Are big companies reducing hazardous greenhouse emissions which pollute the atmosphere? Are they rehabilitating the land they generate huge profits from? As communities, how responsible are we with the waste we generate? Is it dumped at the designated areas? Do we plant trees to replace those we chop down for wood? Are we following correct farming methods to combat soil erosion? Are attitudes changing to those destroying the environment through veld fires, usually from cigarettes butts?

Desertification results in acute shortages of food and drinking water which mainly affects women and children living in rural areas as they largely depend on the environment for their livelihoods. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation (UNCCD) is mobilising governments of the world and multi-national institutions to combine efforts to fight desertification and land degradation.

Our country has introduced several pieces of legislation such as the Biodiversity Act which promote the conservation of biodiversity. Our goal to conserve biodiversity and use it sustainably to meet our needs and those of the future generations will not be successful if we do not double our efforts to fight desertification and land degradation.

Through our department, the government has also initiated projects to care for and protect the environment. One such program is Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM). CBNRM has already given birth to Machubeni Catchments Management project which we are here to showcase in order to raise public awareness on the importance of land rehabilitation. Other similar projects exist in Madibaneng, in Sekhukhune (Limpopo province) and Mkhuzi in KwaZulu Natal province. These projects have been funded to the tune of R40 million and we will be rolling out further projects throughout the country.

Partnerships with the private sector are also crucial for us to win the battle against desertification and land degradation. To this effect, we are finalising an agreement with Development Bank of Southern Africa that would result in increased funding for CBNRM projects.

I would like to urge other institutions within the private sector to emulate the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and respond to our call for action to intensify our campaign to reverse the negative effects of desertification and land degradation.

Harvesting of natural resources for livelihoods should be done sustainably. All stakeholders should be capacitated to implement projects that embrace the principles of sustainable development. Let us also remember that our beautiful environment has already created thousands of jobs by attracting tourists into our country.

We need to sustain this interest of over 8 million tourists who visit our country each year to ensure continuous injection of much needed foreign currency into our economy which in turn creates jobs. Figures of tourists who prefer visiting South Africa keep on increasing.

If we neglect the environment, it will become less appealing and tourist numbers will start

to dwindle. We don't need this scenario. In the unlikely event that it happens, many of us will not only lose jobs, but also the ability to provide for our families.

In conclusion, the environment is like white blood cells which defend our bodies against diseases. Once they surrender defeat to all sorts of attacks, human life perishes. For our sake and to create a legacy which future generations should proudly inherit, we need to spare no efforts in our fight to protect the environment.

Thank you.

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