

Address by
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WHY WE NEED A NEW APPROACH TO ACHIEVE OUR GLOBAL WATER GOALS

In launching today's activities, I want to reflect on five days of exciting and challenging work here at the Water Dome as well as on the complex negotiations now drawing to a close in Sandton.

But I must also reflect on some more fundamental processes that impact upon our ability to achieve the goals of sustainable development, the long process of de-colonization and liberation of Africa, now substantially complete; the end of an epoch of the cold war and its sequences; the resurgence of a new form of global capitalism.

What I want to do, is to set the scene for today's activities, and draw from this larger canvas some conclusions about the significance of what is happening here in Johannesburg in general and the Water Dome in particular.

It has become very clear to me since I assumed the honorary mantle of African Water Ambassador six months ago, that water is indeed crucial to sustainable development, that as Crown Prince William of Orange says, without water there is no future.

We need to manage our limited water resources effectively to:

- Harness the great power of our rivers, to generate sustainable energy
- Ensure our Health
- Produce our Food
- Promote peace and cooperation between countries which share rivers and Lakes, and
- Sustain the ecosystems on which we all ultimately depend.

And of course, in all these areas, the proper use and management of our precious water helps to lift the burden of poverty from the shoulders of our people and in so doing to create the conditions for truly sustainable development. Needless to say, cooperation in utilization of water resources especially in the case of shared water bodies will prevent the occurrences of conflict in this area.

The big challenge is that our waters still run through a deeply divided world.

As President Mbeki, the Chairperson of the Johannesburg Earth Summit and the current President of the African Union said a few days ago:

“We are confronting social behavior that has pity neither for beautiful nature nor for living human beings. This social behavior has produced and entrenches a global system of apartheid. The suffering of the billions who are the victims of this system calls for the same response that drew the peoples of the world into the struggle for the defeat of apartheid in this country.

“Our common and decisive victory against domestic apartheid confirms that you, the peoples of the world, have both the responsibility and the possibility to achieve a decisive victory against global apartheid. Out of Johannesburg and out of Africa, must emerge something new that takes the world forward away from the

entrenchment of global apartheid, to the realization of the goals of sustainable development. “

The world of water is not exempt from this accurate diagnosis. And while we have reflected on many of the water challenges, we need to understand how these fit into the broader picture.

It is indeed clear to anyone who has spent just a short time here at the Water Dome, that we understand many of the challenges that face us in the water sector, and also that there are already available many of the technological and human resources, needed to address them.

What then is missing?

What is it that prevents us from bringing water to those without, from lifting from our people the burden of ill health, the indignity of having to wait for darkness to toilet?

What is it that prevents our farmers from applying well known technologies that use scarce water more productively, to get “more crop per drop of water”.

Clearly, there are barriers, such as institutional, financial, and political. They reflect the loader forces that define the globalised world. So let us be bold and ask ourselves what prevents countries, communities and families from escaping the burden of poverty?

Of course there are some obvious answers:

- Unfair trade regimes prejudice those who are already poor. Farmers who get low prices cannot afford to invest in water efficiency.

- Investment flows that promote a “race to the bottom” maintain impoverishment and make it impossible to manage water service properly. If wages are rock bottom, the urban poor cannot afford to fund new water works for their growing cities.
- Where the private sector is driven by the untrammelled desire to maximize profits, they will have every incentive to engage in more or less corrupt practices that lead public authorities to make the wrong decisions, to turn a blind eye to gross pollution of our waters.

All fair-minded people must surely join together to agree that this is not good enough.

We know that there are challenges in the field of trade, investment, and development finance. We know that questions of governance are not just about competence but also about the gross distortions that occur when self-enrichment rather than the public good drives our public officials and profit is placed before people.

The theme selected for today, Water and Globalization, aims to address some of these issues head on.

So there will be discussions on the role that the private sector can play in water delivery; surely we can get beyond the polemics to find a balanced approach that puts people before profits but draws on the vast intellectual and financial resources of the water industry.

We will hear from trade experts on how the abstruse deliberations of the WTO in places like Doha can impact on both the way we provide water services and the way we set the economic framework for the farmers who use the greatest proportion of the world’s water.

We will have an opportunity to listen to and engage some very senior leaders and experts on the vexed question of corruption that eats at our ability to deliver effective public services.

And we will ask whether the current global organization of water is adequate to address these challenges and ensure that the needs of water are heard in more powerful forums.

Ladies and gentlemen and friends, it should be clear to all in Johannesburg this week that those who talked with such confidence only a few years ago of “the end of history” must be disquieted. It is a matter of our very human survival that we will have to find new ways of living together if we are to avert catastrophe.

I return to the words of President Thabo Mbeki who earlier this week spoke for us all when he said:

“I believe that the recognition has grown that, indeed, the world has grown into a global village. The survival of everybody in this village demands that we develop a universal consensus to act together to ensure that there is no longer any river that divides our common habitat into poor and wealthy parts.

The noble concept of human solidarity has, once again, regained currency as a driving force in the reconstruction and development of our common world. This confirms our collective capacity to overcome cynicism, to outgrow market fundamentalism, to accept the imperative for people-centered development. “

President Mbeki’s characterization of the roles and responsibilities in a global village is very much in line with the true spirit, values, and ethics prevailing in a village. It is for example inconceivable to visualize a situation where a tragedy befalls a member of a village while other villagers remain indifferent. In a village, whether it is a funeral or a wedding there is an element of shared concern and responsibilities. Whatever their differences, there is a factor of solidarity that binds together members of a

village community. Admittedly a village is a small unit. Yet in many ways the world today thanks to the advancement of science and technology and especially information communication technology has also become a much smaller place. Our global village therefore needs to take the issue of our common humanity and shared responsibility seriously and strive towards the goal of genuine interdependence.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, that is the challenge I would like you to take forward today and when you leave Johannesburg, to move forward into a new African century and a new and more people friendly world. Let water be the force that brings people together and not a barrier that keeps us apart! Let us respond to the voice of the children who came yesterday to

Water Dome pledging their commitment to a new water future. They asked us to stop talking and start acting. Let us get down to work. Let us work on the implementation of the outcome of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and especially on water and sanitation.

I thank you for your kind attention.