

**ADDRESS BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT AFFAIRS, HONOURABLE MIKE MABUYAKHULU
ON THE OCCASSION OF THE CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT
MONTH IN DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL
20th JUNE 2014.**

Programme Director;
Executive Mayor of EThekweni, Councilor James Nxumalo;
The Speaker of EThekweni, Councilor Logan Naidoo;
Esteemed Councillors;
Amakhosi Present;
Dignitaries invited to the Celebration;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
All protocol observed.

On behalf of the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal we wish to express our delight for being part of this occasion where we are gathered to look at strategies of how, working together, we can protect our greatest resource – our environment.

Programme Director, we have been asked by the national Minister of Environmental Affairs, Ms Edna Molewa to lead our celebration as she is busy in Parliament this week following the State of the Nation Address by President Jacob Zuma.

We are particularly pleased that we celebrate this year's Environment Month in this beautiful and tourism-friendly province of KwaZulu-Natal.

As all of us know, the 5th of June was World Environment Day, but as South Africa we have dedicated the month of June as, in addition to being Youth Month, Environment Month, hence we are gathered here today to celebrate with you.

This Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment to create, educate and raise awareness on environmental conservation.

This is a significant celebration as it demonstrates the support and commitment of the peoples and governments of the world to environmental protection and preservation.

Programme Director, the importance of this day cannot be sufficiently emphasised.

There can be no denying that in order for us as humanity to prosper and to foster sustainable development we need to pay particular attention to how we continue to nurture and protect our environment, which has come under severe strain owing to, among other factors, environmental degradation and changes in weather patterns.

We, as South Africa are part of the global campaign to promote sustainable development and also are active proponents for the global drive towards a green economy in the face of this growing threat posed by Climate Change.

Actually, our celebration this year is also held under the international theme ***“Raise your voices, not the sea levels”***.

It is an international clarion call to action, inviting all of us to raise levels of awareness about climate change in order that our future generations can inherit a safe and climate friendly future.

We are also alive to the fact that Climate change poses a great threat to economic growth and sustainable development and threaten to reverse the gains we have made over the past 20 years of democracy.

The international thrust of our Celebrations for this year is on Small Island States since these states and developing countries are most vulnerable to climate change.

The combined emission of small islands represents less than 1 per cent of global emissions.

Yet, it is these islands that bear the brunt of changes in climate patterns.

It is common cause that rising sea levels can and do disparege land along coastlines of low-lying islands, disrupting economies and livelihoods.

Indications are that by 2080, 70 million people and up to 30% of Africa's coastal infrastructure could face the risk of coastal flooding due to a rise in sea levels as a result of climate change.

Our National Climate Change Response Policy is our roadmap that spells out our efforts to address climate change as we migrate towards a green economy.

The Policy warns us that our coastal human settlements are the most vulnerable to an increase in sea-levels due to climate change.

Coastal areas provide habitation, work, and recreation to approximately 40% of the South African people.

Coastal settlements like ours are vulnerable to climate change primarily through the effects of climate change on sea-level rise, storm surges, coastal flooding, marine environment and estuaries, including ocean acidification, higher sea temperatures, and changes to ocean currents.

Equally, coastal economies are vulnerable to climate change primarily through its effects on fishing.

On top of already-diminished fish stocks, increased water temperatures, ocean acidification and changes to aquatic nutrients threaten marine biodiversity and the distribution and range of alien invasive species.

Extreme weather events will also threaten fishing boats and changes in the condition of estuaries will threaten fish reproduction.

The 3,650 km South African coastline is generally exposed to moderate to strong wave action and provides little natural shelter to storms from the sea. With climate change expected to increase both the frequency and intensity of storms, the South African coastline will become increasingly vulnerable to storm surges, coastal erosion, sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

A continual assessment of coastal defences, particularly at harbours, estuaries and lagoons, and along low-lying coastal land, is needed to reduce damage in high risk areas.

What needs to be shared is that climate change is real and will continue to have devastating effects unless we embark on urgent behavioural change that will assist in reduction of carbon emissions.

When we burn oil and coal, we release carbon into the atmosphere. This carbon rises into the atmosphere, but unlike many other gases it does not disintegrate; it remains in the upper atmosphere for many generations.

Changes in climate patterns may over time cause major damage to the way we farm and fish as well as to the urban and rural infrastructure. Therefore it stands to reason that effects of Climate Change continue to impact negatively on food security.

As a country, our policy approach is both developmental and transformational. It is developmental in that we are prioritising climate change responses that have significant mitigation or adaptation benefits, and have significant economic growth, job creation, public health, risk management and poverty alleviation benefits.

It is transformational in that we are seeking to address climate change at a scale of economy that supports the required innovation and finance flows needed for a transition to a lower carbon, efficient, job creating, equitable and competitive economy. In essence, it is about sustainable development. Our economy becomes resilient as we reduce the emission of carbon dioxide and other gases that lead to increasing global temperatures. We're also, as a country, working hard on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. We have done extensive work to analyse the emission reduction potential in key economic sectors, and to understand the social and economic opportunities and impacts of reducing emissions.

Again, South Africa's approach is one of promoting sustainable development by prioritising climate change responses that have significant mitigation benefits, and have significant economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation benefits.

In conclusion, Programme Director, we believe that this day should collectively galvanise all of us to be alive to the reality that protecting our environment is not only something that we should do once a month but should be infused in our day to day existence. This is the type of collective consciousness that we need in order to ensure that sustainable development is not a destination but it is a manner of how we do things every day because we cannot begin to talk about a bright future for humanity when our greatest resource the environment is not protected.

I thank you