

JAY BHAGWAN PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH

Honourable guests, CEOs, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed a great privilege and honour for me to represent WISA at this level. The appointment as President and the term are special, as they coincide with our country's "ten years of democracy" celebrations. As we commemorate this decade of freedom, we also celebrate ten years of achievements.

The water sector in South Africa, which encompasses all of you and me, must take pride in what we have achieved over the decade. Against the urgency of meeting the basic water and sanitation needs of our previously disadvantaged communities, we have tackled the issues confronting us and through many innovative and controversial approaches, are now providing basic water services to around 10 million South Africans. Though we got off to a late start on sanitation, it is admirable that with the commitment of Government, the wheels have been put into motion for the sector to achieve full service provision by 2010.

A thirsty nation requires the resource of life to service its health, social and economic needs. On this front we have introduced a radically new water law, which is the envy of the world. Within the Water Act we have introduced a variety of new legislation and strategies which will ensure that our resources will sustain and accelerate our country's development.

Yes, we at WISA, definitely have good reasons to celebrate. Since the new democracy, we have seen many achievements and progress made by WISA. In addressing transformation and change we have seen gradual improvements at an institutional level: Our first woman President, Dr Elsie Meintjies, followed by the appointments of Mr Pumezo Jonas and Mr Tony Bowers. We have over this period increased the WISA membership by over approximately 100%, as well as established the WISA Biennial Conference and Afriwater, as prestigious water events on the regional calendar. We have also, at a Board level, been sensitive to gender issues and at present have at least 35% representation of women. We are also seeing greater interest and participation of youth and students in the activities of WISA and have proactively entered the foray of training and capacity-building for our sector practitioners and professionals.

There have been many milestones which we have created in this short period of time- achievements that we can be proud of and achievements that strengthen the proverbial backbone of WISA. Of course, in the process, we should also recognize some of the missed opportunities and new demands being made on a voluntary organization such as ours. We at WISA view these as challenges that we are keen to address in the near future. Thus, as professionals, leaders, practitioners, we are all contributors to the vision of "Some for all, forever" – A cause that is the very fabric of our 10 years of democracy as well as the future of our beautiful country. Hence, we must all take some credit and celebrate ten years of achievements in the water sector and, as we look ahead, we must face the challenges that lie ahead. These include meeting Government's goals of water and sanitation provision,

achieving the requirements of the National Water Act, National Water Services Act and Strategic Framework, and ensuring that water resources are managed so as to ensure sustainability.

WISA has a significant and important role to play in support of sustainable water management in South Africa. I refer to a comment made by the WISA ex-President where he stated that it is important that WISA continue its effort to bring about greater cooperation, among various professional water institutions and or water-related interest groups. There is growing need for water professionals to work closely with one another to ensure that resources are not duplicated and/or used to serve the selfish interests of one specific group to the detriment of others, and in so doing violating the principle of "Some for all, forever".

It is a period in time where WISA must reflect on its successes and achievements and build more monuments during the next ten years of our freedom. WISA has a strong foundation and such good architects and master builders to enable us to continue. The biggest challenge for the sector will be to keep the taps flowing and WISA has role to play in bringing together relevant stakeholders to create a shared vision which can assist the water industry developing long-term plans needed to ensure a sustainable future.

In this endeavour, WISA has already instituted a strategic process: the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan will become a core focus of WISA over the short term as it aims to become more dynamic and relevant. It is my intention to follow through with positioning WISA as an integral and essential component of the water sector. A critical aspect for WISA is to also consider its vulnerability. Being a voluntary body dependent on subscriptions and income from its members, poses many challenges in providing increasing valuable services to its members. WISA must adopt some business principles to reduce its risks. This will ensure that we will be able to continuously provide value to our members and to the sector.

I would like to share some recent developments with you:

- There is a commitment from both WISA and the IWA-SA National committee to sign an agreement, which will ensure that all WISA members will, in future, enjoy the benefits provided by the IWA and have access to a wide pool of international knowledge. This significant development will result in many coordinated activities of the partners, which will assist in the building of water capacity and competencies in the region.
- WISA has been asked to participate on the Business Council for Water A NEPAD initiative.
- WISA has been requested to participate in the development of sector skills, and is now represented on the SETA and NQF, where it will continuously influence the needs of our members.

It is evident that there is an exciting future for WISA, as well as many challenges. As we look ahead we see a growth in the population of young water professionals, a resource that we must tap and develop further. It is our responsibility to ensure successes of our water knowledge and competencies. During my term I will strive to keep up the momentum set by my predecessors, to ensure that the Strategic Plan is implemented to ensure that WISA continues to be a dynamic organization which will grow in stature so as to contribute to the sector and to the country's vision and goals. With your assistance and commitment, and the confidence bestowed on me, coupled with the able support and leadership of WISA management, I am confident that our objectives will be realized. I would like to acknowledge the commitment of our CEO, the ex-President, the staff, the Board and council of WISA in making WISA a key role player in the water sector arena.

I take this opportunity to welcome our new Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, the Honourable Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, and to thank the outgoing Minister, the Honourable Mr Ronnie Kasrils, for his vast contribution during his term of office.

Thanks to Danie Klopper, City of Cape Town, Western Cape Branch, sponsors and Patron Members to bring us together again for another successful event.

In closing I would like to share with you our connectivity with water, through a very good poem written by a water activist from Malaysia, Mr Cecil Rajah, whom I had the privilege of sharing a platform with at the recent World Water Forum. It is called "Aquarian Connection" and emphasised why we network with organizations such as WISA. It goes as follows:

Words or tongue do not matter:
Voda or Wada Maji or Pani
Agua or Wasser –
This is the glue that holds all life together.

It has neither shape, taste. colour or odour
But an awesome power
To break, batter, devastate, deluge and destroy:

Yet power to resuscitate, sustain, heal, cleanse, create, bless &
revive

Not so much essence of life as Life itself.

In water conceived, nurtured, nourished
We, no more than walking sacks of water
Too often taken this boon for granted, wobble towards disaster

From water we came, with water now we flow
Our liquid lives so intertwined that when water goes

WE GO !!!