

**STATEMENT BY L N SISULU, SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, WATER AND SANITATION
BUDAPEST WATER SUMMIT**

Date: Tuesday 15 October 2019

Venue: Millenáris Park, Budapest

**TOPIC: VALUE OF WATER VS. COSTS OF A WATER CRISIS, ARE WE
TALKING ABOUT THE SAME?**

Moderator; Mr Aaron Salzberg

My fellow Key Note Speaker: H.E. Mr Ahmat Awad Sakine

Excellencies

Distinguished Panel Members

Representatives of Member States and Development Partners

Ladies and gentleman

This session addresses a very important, fundamental question to all of us; “Value of water against the cost of a Water Crisis”, and to evaluate if we are talking the same. Clearly this kind of clarity seeking theme can only be advanced if there is confusion or conflict in defining a concept.

Moderator, while the room is finding their own definition and positions on this compelling theme, allow me to congratulate the Government of Hungary and its people for hosting this hallmark event of the 2019 Budapest Water Summit under the theme, **“Preventing a Water Crisis”**, an urgent call for decisive action.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to form partnerships to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy

peace and prosperity. This call requires of all of us to achieve the same, hence, at this moment and in the global multilateral history, Member States continue to navigate the different challenges confronting the political, social, and economic architecture of water through robust engagements at international fora such as the Budapest Water Summit. We all hope to find a common resolve, on water, as a resource facing a looming crisis, brought to our attention once again, through the 2019 summit theme.

We in South Africa are unfortunately in the top 30 of the driest countries in the world and as a consequence periodically experiences “water crisis”, such as we are experiencing right now in akin regions, which informs our commitment to contribute earnestly to all engagements that seek to avoid this looming water crisis. In the Southern African region we share rivers; like many other countries. South Africa, shares 60% of its fresh water resources with its neighbours. Therefore, our relations with our partners remain key for economic development and social sustainability.

We have just emerged from one of the worst droughts in many years: 2014 to 2019 and in some parts of the country the worst drought in recorded history. The drought conditions are still very serious in at least two of the nine Provinces in our country, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape. Furthermore, unseasonably warm weather also poses a threat for the approaching summer rainfall season as extreme drought has already started to cripple both agriculture and our water resources. The cost of dealing with these crises on an emergency basis is extremely high and places additional strain on an already constrained economy. It is therefore necessary while dealing with these crises that we focus on putting long term interventions in place to ensure water resilience going forward. These long term interventions do of course

come at substantial cost to all consumers and will have a negative impact on the poor.

However, despite South Africa being a semi-arid climate and being a “water stressed” country our average domestic water use is around 237 litres per person per day, which is 64 litres per person per day more than the world average of 173 litres per person per day. Looking at these figures, one would be tempted to ask the question: Is this because of the value that consumers place on water, or is it the low cost of water? It is more likely to be a combination of both value and cost, and points to the need for improved communication, education in terms of the impacts of water on society.

The most recent example of a potential crisis, which gained international focus, was the way in which we very effectively dealt with the 2015 to 2018 Drought in the Western Cape in general and the City of Cape Town in particular. Through a combination of the effective management of the available water resources, application of drought tariffs for water consumption, extensive communication campaigns, partnerships with communities, business and agriculture a crisis was averted. During the height of the drought domestic water consumption was reduced to approximately 80 litres per person per day (a very significant reduction). Plans were also developed and are currently being implemented for the long term water security (resilience) of the region. This is a very good example of water users getting a much better and realistic appreciation of the “value of water”, but also the impact that the “cost of water” can have in dealing with a crisis and pushing down consumption.

In the context of dealing with a crisis, the “value of water” and the “cost of water” are not the same thing. Water security and universal access to water will demand more money, skills, management and improved regulation.

We are at a very important historical junction in South Africa in relation to land. We are in the process of the redistribution of land to right the wrongs of the past and for this programme to be viable, water is essential in land as it is for all other economy reform.

Looking beyond dealing with any crisis we need to bear in mind the water has value culturally, economically and of course to the environment. In the South African Context our constitution states that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water. Furthermore our constitution states that everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being, and to have an environment that is protected for the benefit of present and future generations.

Our core focus, therefore, must be the commitment to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all and to focus on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, and furthermore contributing to the achievement of the other SDGs that rely on the development and management of water resources.

I thank you