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**Speech by Ambassador L Briët
on the occasion of
the National Water Summit
17 March 2008**

Honorable Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mrs L.B.Hendricks MP
Dist. Professor Biswas,
Hon. MEC Mahlangu,
Hon. Ms Mjoli-MNcube,
Hon. Pam Yako, Director General, DWAF
Distinguished guests,
Programme Director,
Members of the media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a privilege for me to be here this morning and to share this platform with you, Minister Hendricks. Water has been central to the European Commission's programme in South Africa from well before my arrival 3 years ago, but it was my privilege, on Europe Day 2006, to publicly pronounce on our commitment to the water services sector in the country and indeed the region.
- Today, at this National Water Summit, which marks the start of Water Week, leading to International Water Day on 22 March, I wish to re-affirm our commitment to walk with you, Minister, and your Department, the challenging road towards a better life for all (and not just for some) South Africans. I need not stress the importance of water to economic and social development and its importance to environmental wellbeing.
- But climate change is transforming the nature of water security since global warming will transform the hydrological patterns that determine the availability of water. This means that many of the world's most water stressed areas, including southern Africa, are likely to get less water with water flows becoming less predictable and subject to extreme events. Suddenly conflict and possibly water wars (all major river basins in Africa being shared by 2 or more countries) no longer seem far-fetched. So, there is no time like the present to be pro-active! Water is a strategic asset.
- I want to take this opportunity to express a special welcome to you, Ms Pam Yako, as new Director General of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, to the water family. Your experience on gender issues, in local government and also the environmental sector certainly provides a solid foundation for the challenges that lie ahead. I wish you well and look forward to further deepening our close and fruitful partnership with you and your Department.
- At this point allow me to place on record that the EU remains committed to the agenda of the Paris Declaration on co-ordination and harmonisation and that our assistance dovetails with and builds on South African priorities in the sector.

With the comprehensive policy framework established, now is the time to intensify the implementation. Minister, we support President Mbeki's call for Business Unusual. We attach the highest importance to close donor co-ordination and in this DWAF is providing dynamic leadership.

- It has been thirteen years since democratic rule commenced in South Africa. I recognise that despite considerable and ongoing challenges you have managed to set up the institutions essential to a democracy, have developed policies to improve the quality of life of the vast majority, and have initiated countless programmes to aggressively address issues of poverty. We salute your successes and are privileged to have been a partner to democratic South Africa since its beginning in 1994.
- In the water sector, targets have been set which exceed those under Millennium Development Goal 7 (ensure environmental sustainability) and MDG Target 10 (reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water). In fact, the MDG water target has already been met by South Africa. (But I do not want to prejudice the break away session on this subject this afternoon).
- Of course safe, reliable and adequate access to water and sanitation is essential in achieving other MDGs such as those on HIV/AIDS, hunger and poverty. On the specific issue of HIV/AIDS, (one of those cross-cutting issues) the water sector of course has an essential role to play since inadequate access to water and sanitation restricts opportunities for hygiene and exposes people with HIV to increased risk of infection. But let me add that safe water and sanitation are critical also in achieving Millennium Development goals 4 and 5 in relation to infant and maternal health! Recent reports show that South Africa faces important challenges in this regard.
- Our partnership has matured and deepened over the years and increasingly requires greater coherence, clear objectives, and a shared forward-looking political vision with a view to strengthening joint political action. Our partnership needs to clearly spell out what either party can expect from the other on the domestic, regional, continental and global fronts. We have to do justice to South Africa's and the EU's unique positions in our ever-globalising world. The European Council last Thursday and Friday devoted much of its time to energy and climate change, including the security implications of climate change.
- In this respect a 2006 communication from the European Parliament, "Towards an EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership", proposes a comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated long-term strategy for political co-operation with South Africa.
- During 2008 South Africa and the European Union adopted a Joint Action Plan to implement and give substance to the strategic partnership. It does not mean, of course, that we must agree on everything. But it does mean that we agree to engage in open, concrete and transparent dialogue ... moving from political dialogue to shared objectives and strategic political co-operation on regional, African and global issues. The good news is that we share a common vision on critical challenges from peace and security to climate change.
- The strategic partnership enhances South Africa's national, regional and continental responsibilities – it is a key component of the EU's strategy for Africa as a whole.

- The EC, EU, remains South Africa's largest development partner ... by far the largest when we include the support given by our Member States. For the 2007 – 2013 funding period the EC's commitment (alone, not counting the EU Member States) will rise to €980 million, just short of €1 billion, or more than R11 bn.
- To guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of these funds, the European Commission, together with the South African Government and 10 EU Member States, jointly drafted the 2007 – 2013 Country Strategy. It is premised on development co-operation being all about a reduction in poverty and inequality and emphasises four strategic goals:
 - a. Promote pro-poor, sustainable economic growth, including in the second economy, i.e. economic growth that focuses on generating employment, reducing inequality, developing skills and tackling social exclusion.
 - b. Improve the capacity and provision of basic services for the poor at provincial and municipal level and promote equitable access to social services. These services mainly relate to health, HIV/AIDS, education, housing, and the infrastructure to provide basics such as water, sanitation, access to sustainable energy services, waste management and communication.
 - c. Promote good governance. In the public domain the focus will be on fighting crime, including corruption, and promoting safety, security and the rule of law. In the non-public domain the focus will be on strengthening civil society — especially NGOs, including social partners, and community-based organisations (CBOs).
 - d. Trilateral Cooperation: The EU supporting SA's own efforts in working towards Regional and Pan-African integration, albeit in the political or economic spheres.
- Cross-cutting issues include gender, the environment, HIV/AIDS, capacity building including private-public partnerships, good governance and innovation.
- But back to water! Minister, as EU (Development) Commissioner Louis Michel has stated “no strategy for the reduction of poverty can ignore people's vital requirements for water, and sustainable development policies must address the need for equitable and sustainable management of water resources in the interests of society as a whole.”
- Our support to the water sector is based on a strategic approach for equitable, efficient and sustainable management of water resources. It is based on internationally agreed core principles known as the Dublin principles.
- To date the Commission has supported six programmes in the water and sanitation sector with a total value exceeding €200 mil, (more than R2 bn at current exchange rates). All these programmes have aimed to increase the coverage of the provision of water and sanitation services to previously disadvantaged communities.
- The bulk of this support, some €135 mil, has been to the Masibambane programme that was instigated in 2001. This support has been augmented by contributions from a number of EU member states including Ireland, the UK, France and the Netherlands. Masibambane is a success story that demonstrates

what can be achieved through the innovative implementation of a sector wide approach programme.

- Minister, today I am delighted to be able to announce with you further support to the Water Sector in South Africa. We now commit a further €107 mil (in the form of Sector Budget Support) to the third phase of the Masibambane programme over a period of three years with the focus on Water for Growth and Development.
- The water legislation in South Africa is internationally acclaimed as best practice, as are the national water resources strategy and the Strategic Framework for Water Services. Future EC support will assist with:

The rollout of this legislation and will focus on

- enshrining a holistic approach to integrated water resource management in the water sector in South Africa,
 - supporting sector collaboration, institutional development and capacity building,
 - the establishment of basin management authorities,
 - the establishment of the role of civil society and issues relating to the environmental pillar of integrated water resources management and financing of the water sector.
- In closing I must praise the efforts of all involved in our support to the water sector in South Africa and I include here the very dedicated Civil Society partners. Minister, the support that the management of your Department has given to this Programme is exemplary. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and the European Union Commission are locked into an intensive partnership. The EU does not always make an easy partner and I must appreciate publicly the maturity with which the Department has dealt with our peculiarities.
 - The EU's support to the water sector underscores its strong commitment to supporting development in South Africa. Finally I am confident that the Masibambane programme, and others like it, will deliver on their objectives.
 - Minister, allow me to pay a special tribute to a member of my own staff at the EU Delegation. Without Dr Charles Reeve a lot of what we have jointly achieved would not have happened. Please join me in a round of applause for Dr Reeve!

Thank you