

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT KGALEMA MOTLANTHE AT THE CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT - 03 MARCH 2009, GHALLAGER ESTATE, MIDRAND**

Minister of Environment and Tourism, Marthinus Van Schalkwyk  
Other Ministers and Deputy Ministers  
Members of executive councils from various provinces  
Mayors  
Your Excellencies members of the diplomatic corps  
Directors General  
Honoured Guests  
International observers  
Ladies and Gentleman

There is a law of nature that states that without food there is no life and that whereas nature provides human beings and other members of the animal kingdom with the means to support life, it does not present these means to support life on a silver platter. Human beings have to work hard acting upon nature in order to survive.

As human beings act upon nature to produce the means to support life, they necessarily fashion instruments and equipment to maximise capacity to produce. This is an ongoing struggle between human beings and nature. It is this struggle between human beings and nature that has tempered with the balance of nature and created a situation where some of the resources of nature could be depleted. This could pose a threat to life itself.

But this ongoing struggle between human beings and nature also is the basis of the accumulation of knowledge and the understanding of the laws of nature.

Albert Einstein once said that in the heart of difficulty lies opportunity. It is only in the context of severe challenges that the human mind is at its most creative, when it realises the limitations of continuing on the path that has created the difficulty in the first place, that the search for a new approach begins in earnest. This is the moment when human beings engage in struggle to find the opportunity in the heart of difficulty.

It is in pursuit of opportunity, of a new approach, of creative and sustainable solutions that I open this second National Climate Change Summit.

Our deliberations at this summit will define the future response of our nation to this far-reaching and growing global challenge. It is therefore no surprise that this issue has moved to the top of the government's agenda, along with many other defining challenges that we face as a country.

This Summit formally launches a process of developing the National Climate Change Response Policy. In this regard, the Summit will lay a firm foundation for the policy development process and will also ensure that all stakeholders, both public and private, are clear on their roles and responsibilities in shaping this important policy.

At the same time, the outcome of this Summit must resonate globally as South Africa takes its place at the table with other nations to engage in the complex negotiations on Climate Change. It is only through coordinated and comprehensive global action that humanity will effectively deal with this threat. In the context of the theme "Climate Action Now" the Summit will lay a firm foundation for developing policy that can be implemented at home and advocated in International negotiations.

Already, South Africa is playing a pro-active and constructive role in the multilateral negotiations. Yesterday the Socialist International Commission for a Sustainable World Society met in Hermanus to hear the Africa's perspectives on the global negotiations.

The outcome of these negotiations, scheduled to be concluded in Copenhagen at the end of this year, will have to achieve a delicate balance of interests that accommodates the concerns and aspirations of developing and developed countries alike.

We have also been entrusted to host the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2011.

As you know, Africa is one of the regions least responsible for climate change, yet it is the most affected and is also the least able afford the costs of adaptation.

The question we may ask: What does climate change have to do with Africa and what does it have to do with fighting poverty! According to a report by a Nigerian scientist, Anthony Nyong, an additional 100 million people will go hungry by the year 2050 as a result of rising temperatures and lower rainfall.

From our vantage point, the developmental interests of the African continent will be foremost at the Copenhagen meeting. The Copenhagen agreement would therefore need to address, in a fair, effective and inclusive way, the four building blocks of a future climate regime:

- adaptation to a changing climate;
- mitigation of Green House Gas emissions;
- transfer of climate friendly technology; and
- financing of all these measures.

Yet, we must realise that this Summit takes place against the backdrop of another global crisis – the global economic crisis. As with climate change, this is largely a crisis that is not of our making, but one which, like climate change, will affect us all, and the poor most. Acting now on climate change presents the best possibility to overcome the challenges of the global economic crisis through investment in pro-poor, job creating and sustainable “green growth”.

If the world community does not take decisive action soon, it is the poorest that will be hardest hit. Poor communities are the innocent bystanders – they have contributed least to the problem, but will bear the brunt of its devastating impact.

The experience and perspectives of Africa are central to our deliberations today. The Congo Basin is home to one of the two remaining forest “Lungs” in the world with the capability to absorb large amounts of green house gasses. The importance of nature and environment in our region reinforces the importance that we place on nature, environment and the land. In order to emphasise this point I wish to quote from the first African lady to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, Ms. Wangari Mathai: “For many years I have asked myself, ‘What can I do for the Earth?’ I want to inspire others to ask that question, and answer it wherever and whenever they can. My experience has taught me that individual efforts do matter. However, unless there is political will and public support around the world,

the enormous benefits the environment bestows on us will be lost. Future generations will pay the price. “

For South Africa, the climate change challenge is therefore not only one of climate stabilisation, but it is ultimately also about combating poverty, livelihoods, energy security and sustainable development.

We must act. We owe it to millions of people who will be directly affected: small scale farmers who have to deal with greater climate uncertainty; small exporters and large industries that have to meet the requirements of the markets which are carbon sensitive.

Dealing with climate change requires a coherent and co-ordinated action involving both developed and developing countries under the leadership of the United Nations.

We hope that the deliberations of this summit will recommendations that could form the basis of giving effect to Cabinet’s mandate of formulating sound policy framework for transition to a low carbon economy.

I have no doubt that government’s vision and the implementation of this policy framework will be the best insurance policy future generations will have against the potentially devastating impact of climate change. And let me add, the worst impact of climate change can be avoided if the rest of the world take up the challenge in a similarly serious way. We are therefore looking at developed countries to take the lead with absolute emission reductions, and to support the efforts of developing countries in concrete ways.

Whereas developed countries should commit to legally-binding and absolute emission reduction targets against a fixed base year, developing countries should make reductions relative to their business-as-usual emission trajectories, in other words: deviate substantially from baseline.

It is in this context that the South African Government has agreed to a strategic policy framework for our emissions to peak between 2020 and 2025, and then stabilise for a decade, before declining in absolute terms towards mid-century. This will be possible if technology, investment and policy, identified as key planks in our strategic framework, are brought together into a coherent strategy.

In terms of the government's decision of July last year, state-led policy interventions will play a key role, and will need to focus on getting the economic incentive, investment structure and, where necessary, the legislative and regulatory framework right while at the same time increasing long-term research and development spending. We have also made clear our intention to put an escalating price on carbon, be that through market mechanisms such as a carbon tax and other regulatory instruments.

We must continue to diversify the energy mix away from coal, whilst shifting to cleaner coal technologies. We have already set a requirement that all new coal fired power stations and coal-to-liquid plants must be carbon capture ready.

In the short-term, we know that we need to dramatically increase our energy efficiency in order to reduce the pressure on our current electricity infrastructure and free up energy for new growth. We also know that, as most of our electricity comes from burning coal, energy efficiency is a win-win solution that increases our competitiveness whilst reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

Simultaneously, we must address the huge adaptation challenges posed by inevitable climate change. South Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change and greater climate variability, and our response in key sectors will therefore also be discussed over the next three days.

South Africa is committed to making the transition to a low carbon economy, to following a sustainable development path and striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals. I

At the end of our deliberations we should have a policy that allows each South African to answer Wanari Mathai's question "What can I do for the Earth?"

I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to our continued engagement on this important issue.

Forward to climate action now!

