



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT THE XIV WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS, DURBAN, 7 SEPTEMBER 2015

Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma

Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Dr José Graziano da Silva

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Senzeni Zokwana

Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Bheki Cele

Minister of Water and Sanitation Nomvula Nkonyane

UN Ambassador for Forestry and the Environment, HRH Crown Prince Laurent of Belgium

Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Senzo Mchunu

Executive Mayor of eThekweni, James Nxumalo

Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers,

Heads of International Agencies and National Forestry and Environmental Organisations

Esteemed Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sanibonani!

A warm welcome to our shores for this, the first World Forestry Congress on African soil.

We are sure your experience here will be invigorating and rewarding.

We are confident this congress will help map the future of the forestry sector as a critical pillar of the sustainable development of our planet.

Our generation is called on to make critical decisions that are likely to impact on our world for years to come.

Forests are a crucial part of our identity. They are part of our shared heritage. They are central to our common future. They are a source of life and wellbeing.

The world today is confronted by severe environmental challenges.

Many communities across the globe are grappling with extreme weather conditions and related phenomena, such as drought and wild forest fires.

We have recently experienced unprecedented drought conditions in parts of South Africa, including here in KwaZulu-Natal.

South Africa is determined to be part of the global response to this global challenge.

Just recently, young men and women from government's *Working on Fire* programme returned from Canada, where they were part of a team that fought wild land fires in the western part of that country.

Such international cooperation helps strengthen our ability to confront many of these transnational challenges.

The global response to climate change will take centre stage again in Paris in December around the COP21 meeting.

I am sure your deliberations will amplify the importance of forests in mitigating the harmful effects of climate change.

This World Forestry Congress is well placed to ensure that the role of forests as the planet's carbon sink is fully understood and acknowledged.

The sustainable management of our forests is therefore critical as we confront global warming.

You carry the important responsibility of making certain that the overall importance of forests is reflected in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals currently being formulated by the United Nations.

The projected global population growth has cast the critical issue of food security into sharper focus.

The current global population stands at about 7.1 billion people and some projections suggest that this number will grow to around 9.3 billion by 2050.

The implication of this growth is that, collectively, we will have to produce 70% more food than we are currently producing.

Our forests have historically been the source of more than just wood.

Many of our communities still harvest a wide range of food products from the forest environment.

The pressures of food security has in many instances resulted in deforestation as societies seek to increase their capacity to feed their people.

The real challenge will be to explore ways in which we are able to ensure the multi-use of land while ensuring the sustainable growth of our forestry assets.

Across the globe, and particularly in large parts of the African continent, communities are confronted by a shortage of potable water.

This challenge is exacerbated in times of extreme weather conditions.

The role of forests in the larger picture of water security must therefore also be acknowledged.

On our continent, permanent flowing rivers tend to originate in forested or wooded areas.

As custodians of policy and legislation, we are increasingly called upon to balance the demands of plantation forestry with water rights in water scarce environments.

The pressures of development often threaten biodiversity.

Policies relating to the forestry sector should therefore also be mindful of the indisputable role forests play in sustaining and protecting biodiversity.

The importance of sustaining forests is often overlooked, even as we daily consume the paper, packaging and a vast range of wood products.

I hope that this congress will highlight for our public the role of forestry in their daily lives.

If we all better understand the enveloping importance of the forestry sector, we will develop cutting edge technologies and attract innovators who will support and develop it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hosting the first World Forestry Congress on the African continent is an honour, which we as South Africa deeply appreciate.

I am pleased to note that the African Forest Forum had the foresight and dedication to ensure that Africa was able to meet and prepare for this Congress over the last three days.

The Africa Day event tomorrow will provide a useful focus on the issues confronting the forestry sector on our continent.

I am informed that some 82% of household energy needs in Africa is supplied in the form of wood harvested from Africa's forests.

As African economies grow, the demand for sawn timber and round wood is escalating dramatically.

The value of the charcoal industry, mostly involving small-scale producers, has been estimated as being in excess of \$25billion per annum.

African forests continue to be the source of a wide range of non-wood products, such as fruit, spices, honey and medicine.

As African leaders, we clearly cannot afford to neglect a policy environment that impacts on so many lives on this continent.

We need a regulatory framework that promotes a sustainable forestry sector and that recognises its economic, hydrological and environmental value to our communities.

In South Africa, we have a vibrant commercial forestry sector.

It plays an important role in supplying our domestic wood and wood product needs, while earning valuable foreign currency through our wood chip and cellulose exports.

The sector presents challenges and opportunities.

Some 50 to 60% of our plantation land is currently under land claims as part of our land restitution process.

Land restitution will result in significant changes in the ownership of the country's forestry lands.

Already we have more than 24,000 small growers –many of them women – who are relatively new entrants into the forestry sector.

We must ensure that they have adequate support in developing their businesses.

The involvement of community forest organisations from other parts of the world in this congress is a welcome opportunity for our small growers to interact with, and learn from, their counterparts.

I am very pleased to see the congress's plans to engage the youth, as they are central to the achievement of a sustainable future.

South Africa's youth must use this opportunity to expand their horizons and find a role for themselves in the future development of the forestry sector at home and beyond.

A group of students from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University attending the International Forestry Student Association conference in the Philippines succeeded in bidding to host the 2017 International Forestry Student Association Symposium in our country.

Delegates from about 55 countries are expected to attend. This will be another forestry first in South Africa.

The Fourteenth World Forestry Congress has a weighty and worthwhile agenda.

We wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to hearing your conclusions.

We encourage you to share them with communities across the globe.

In that way, we can work to ensure that the peoples of the world understand and appreciate the critical importance of forests in securing a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

I thank you.

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The Presidency

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