

ADDRESS BY THE

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY
AND FISHERIES,**

HONOURABLE MR SENZENI ZOKWANA
(MP),

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING
CEREMONY**

OF THE

XIV WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS

ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2015

Programme Director

His Excellency Jorge Viana, the Vice President of the Federal State of Brazil

His Royal Highness Prince Laurent of Belgium and FAO Special Ambassador for Forests and Environment



agriculture,
forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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

His Excellency the former Prime Minister of Sweden Goran Persson

My Colleagues, Fellow Cabinet Ministers of the Republic of South Africa; and

Fellow Ministers responsible for Environment, Forests. Natural Resources, Land, and related portfolios from

- o Democratic Republic of the Congo
- o Ethiopia
- o Gabon
- o Republic of Ghana
- o Madagascar
- o Nepal
- o Rwanda

Mr Jose Graziano da Silva, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations(FAO)

His Excellency, Ambassador Laurence Pistre, FAO Permanent Representative to the European Union

General Bheki Cele, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and other;

Deputy and Assistant Ministers from:

- South Africa
- Peoples Republic of China

- Canada
- Czech Republic
- Kenya
- Republic of Korea
- Sweden
- New Zealand
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Mr Senzo Mchunu, Premier of the host Province of KwaZulu Natal and all Premiers present;

Members of the Executive Council present;

Mr James Nxumalo, Executive Mayor of the City of eThekweni

Representatives of various governments represented here;

Representatives from the UN Agencies and Programmes;

Representatives of intergovernmental and NGO across the world;

Members of the diplomatic corps here present;

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

Bonjour

Buenos Dias

Sanbonani!

Today is a happy day for South Africa and the whole African Continent as we finally raise the curtain at the opening ceremony of the XIV World Forestry Congress.

It is a particular honour for our country to host the largest gathering of the global forestry community on African soil for the first time since the inaugural World Forestry Congress in 1926.

We are indeed privileged to host this six-yearly event at which we will have the opportunity to shape the policy agenda on Sustainable Development and the future of forests and forestry.

I am confident that you will agree that at the heart of every nation, is the quest to develop and enhance the human race. The theme for this Congress, namely, “***Forests and People: Investing in a Sustainable Future***” is particularly more relevant given the diverse challenges people of the world are facing in different Regions.

Forests and the forest sector continue to play a very important role in the lives of the peoples of the world. Forests supply basic needs mainly to many of the poor peoples. Woodfuel, building poles, medicinal plants and edible fruits sourced from forests are all critical to the livelihood of the rural poor, thereby creating a safety net.

Forests not only deliver timber and timber products, but also derive non-wood forest products, which improve the socio-economic standing in our communities.

Trees and forests also contribute towards food security.

The importance of environmental services we derive from forests cannot be over-emphasised. These include biodiversity conservation, climate

change mitigation and protection against desertification and land degradation, watershed services and tourism.

In my humble view, there is still a lot the world needs to do to ensure that the benefits of forests are leveraged. Various reports and discussions have shown and confirmed that better and more sustainable use of forest resources can make a significant contribution towards meeting many of the core global challenges including poverty and hunger, climate change and more sustainable sources of bio-products and bio-energy for human use.

Programme Director, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, forests and the forest sector are well positioned to contribute to mitigate the world's major developmental challenges.

Some interventions I think the international forestry community can make include strengthening the area of forest research and development. Research has shown that trees and forests have the potential to mitigate the effects of climate change. The international community has a role of encouraging the people of the world to plant as many trees as possible, particularly trees of native species and fruit trees which can provide nutrition to our communities.

Research and Development have to be carried out constantly particularly on timber quality, tree breeding, hydrology and pests and diseases which threaten our forests.

We should also be mindful of the increasing threat of unwanted forest fires, which has accompanied the shifts in climate patterns across the globe. More than half a billion rand of commercial forests are lost annually to fire in South Africa alone. The South African government's Working on Fire programme has made a significant impact on our capacity to manage this threat. However, as the recent deployment of our and other countries' fire fighters to Canada demonstrated, the scale of forest fires in the changing climate conditions call for further multinational collaboration to meet these challenges.

Research should also point to us, those tree species which are more resilient to the effects of climate change, forest fires and pests and diseases.

Moreover, ladies and gentlemen, sustainable forest management and developed cannot be fully achieved without participation of local communities. Communities have to be at the fore front of forest conservation and protection.

In South Africa we run the annual National Arbor Week Campaign, which officially ends today and which was anchored by the Presidential One Million Trees Project. We also recently started with the One Tree, One Child project, which are all aimed at raising awareness on the importance of trees and forests and encouraging communities to plant trees (including 70% fruit trees) to ensure food security.

Ladies and Gentlemen, South Africa is forging ahead with promotion of sustainable forest management and development strategies. To this

end, over 82% of South Africa's commercial timber plantations have received certification from the Forest Stewardship Council. This makes South Africa, a country with the highest proportional plantation area in the globe.

For South Africa, our tree planting efforts should also be seen as part of our redressing the inequalities of our past. On the one hand we have big cities like Johannesburg which is regarded as having one of the largest man made forests through the extensive urban forests which were planted. On the other hand, at the dawn of democracy in South Africa, we found many of our townships, particularly our townships, characterized by barren, tree-less pieces of land. We have since embarked upon a number of initiatives aimed at the greening of our townships through the efforts of government, NGO's and corporate support. The potential is clearly there to expand such programmes by tenfold and more, and it is my sincere hope that one of the lasting legacies of this Congress will be a more comprehensive campaign to bring about the greening of our townships with trees which will change the character of our townships, bring shade, nutrition and all the associated benefits of trees to our communities.

As one of the stalwarts of our struggle, once answered when asked why there were so few trees in our townships, he said, "a person who plants a tree is a person who lives with hope." This was not only an apt observation about the long term commitment which one needs for tree planting but an insightful observation of the dehumanizing impact of the apartheid policies. We now must restore hope in our communities. We

can alter the Apartheid landscape in which most of our people still live in. I call on all our forestry partners to give life to a broad national greening project as a means of ensuring a brighter future for our children

The youth is a critical part of any notion of future development. It is critical that we engage our youth to explore the many streams of endeavor in the forestry sector and I am happy to see this Congress' programme including a special session on youth and forestry. I am particularly happy to see the numbers of South African youth being afforded an opportunity to engage with their international counterparts to deliberate the future of the forestry sector and the role in such developments.

I urge you therefore Ladies and Gentlemen to share your experiences in order to enhance each other's efforts in contributing to the Global Sustainable Development Goals.

I THANK YOU!