

# **Water is life, sanitation is dignity**

by Leon Basson MP - DA Shadow Minister of Water and Sanitation

Water is life.

Sanitation is dignity.

Chairperson,

South Africa is one of the few countries in the world that enshrines the basic right to sufficient water in its Constitution, stating; "*Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water*".

However, much remains to be done to fulfil that right.

The Department's legislative mandate ensures that the country's water resources are protected, managed, used, developed, conserved, and controlled by regulating and supporting effective water supply and sanitation delivery.

This is done in accordance with the requirements of water-related policies and legislation that are critical in delivering on people's right to have sufficient food and water, growing the economy, and eradicating poverty.

The management of our national water resources must contribute towards achieving South Africa's growth, development, and socio-economic priorities.

In the National Development Plan one of the seven priorities, as adopted by government for the 2019 – 2024 administration, addressed under Priority 2 is Economic Transformation and Job Creation.

Chairperson, Minister Sisulu must explain the following:

Your government made job creation one of the seven priorities; despite this you appoint 24 unaccredited Cubans engineers at a cost of R 65 million.

Minister, your lame excuse that "*very few of our own engineers would possibly opt to go work in the rural areas*" holds no water. Recently, the labour union, Solidarity, produced a list of 132 local engineers who are willing and ready to assist in government's efforts to address infrastructure challenges in rural communities.

Chairperson, this proves that the deployment of Cuban engineers has nothing to do with the reluctance of local engineers to assist nor has this anything to do with a lack of expertise. This smacks of another money looting scheme by the ANC.

The Engineering Council of South Africa has 34 000 registered professionals, of which more than 14 800 are registered professional engineers. This confirms that South Africa has numerous skilled engineers who are able to assist with its infrastructural challenges.

Yet, you choose to pay millions of rand in accommodating and paying unaccredited Cuban engineers, at the expense of accredited, experienced, and unemployed engineers already registered in South Africa.

If these Cuban engineers are so good, send them back home to sort out their own problems in Cuba. Some towns have only 2 hours of running water every 5 days. At a national level, Cuba's water losses are calculated at around 60%, due to infrastructure failure. This situation is even worse than our own losses of 37%.

Minister, you insist in the media '*no jobs have been stolen*' from South African workers, but the unaccredited Cuban engineers have landed themselves a sweet deal – at the cost of South African engineers.

The DA wants the Minister to inform South Africa now:

- Which steps her department has taken, prior to the signing of the agreement, to ensure South Africans could be employed instead?
- What skill sets do each of these Cuban nationals possess that South African engineers do not?

The DA calls on you Minister, to reverse the appointment of the 24 Cuban engineers and appoint local engineers. However, it now seems you will not send the Cubans home and even go so far as to defend your decision in court.

South Africa's water infrastructure is at risk of failure and this deepening crisis requires leaders from government, business, labour, and civil society to deliberate on a way forward to build capacity at national, provincial, and municipal level to address water challenges.

The DA believes that through meaningful public-private partnerships a solution can be found.

Water specialist indicated that more than R900 billion will be needed in the next 10 years on infrastructure, to avoid a full-scale water crisis.

Currently only R16.9 billion is budgeted for this need with a shortfall of R73.2 billion in this financial year.

Our water crisis is a result of an ANC government's inability to protect, expand, maintain, manage, and finance water infrastructure.

A critical problem in the country is the pollution of our water resources. Since 2014 we've not seen a blue and green drop report that measure the quality of our drinking water and water from municipal wastewater treatment plants released into our rivers and streams.

In the 2014 Blue Drop report, 1 009 water purification plants in the country were assessed. Only 32% of these plants produced excellent drinking water.

The 2014 Green Drop report assessed 824 wastewater treatment plants, receiving 5 000 million litres of sewage every day.

According to the 2014 report, **84 %** of wastewater plants were in Critical Risk, High Risk or Medium Risk with **only 16 %** of these plants in Low Risk.

Oversight shows that this situation worsened since 2014 and this implies that millions of liters of untreated or inadequately treated sewage is illegally discharged into rivers and streams every day.

Chairperson, 82% of South Africa's rivers are now considered threatened.

We just have to look at the polluted state of the Hartbeespoort Dam and the Vaal catchment area.

Chairperson all I can say; This ANC Government is poisoning our freshwater resources.

This is the results of non-compliance in the monitoring and enforcement by this ANC government.

Currently, 19% of the rural population lacks access to a reliable water supply and 33% do not have basic sanitation services.

While rural citizens suffer the most, over 26% of urban and rural schools, and 45% of clinics, have no water access.

Voorsitter, nog 'n probleem binne die water sektor is die wanbetaling vir water deur munisipaliteite. Tans is meer as R26 miljard aan waterrade en die Water Handel Entiteit uitstaande.

Vyf waterrade het vir hulpverlening van R980 miljoen gevra net om hul deure oop te hou.

Minister, government is dragging its feet in taking decisive steps on non-payment of water by municipalities.

- How are you going to protect water boards from collapsing; and
- How are you going to protect access to safe water if municipalities are not going to pay for water?

Chairperson, if we don't resolve the non-payment of water it places the infrastructure projects like the Mokolo-Crocodile River water augmentation project and the raising of the Clanwilliam, Tzaneen and Hazelmere dams at risk.

The DA believe that the poor performance of the Department is the delay for more than 5 years in appointing a Director-General and a Chief Financial Officer. It is unacceptable that there is no urgency in filling these positions. The portfolio committee questioned this and the reply from the Deputy Minister is that the Minister is the only one to determine when and whom to place in these positions.

This is a cause for concern.

Now Minister, you explain to Parliament today, why these positions are not filled and when will it be filled.

The DA request the Minister to speedily resolve and implement the:

- Establishing an independent water regulator to regulate water tariffs; and
- Reduce the issuing of water licences from 300 to 90 days.

Chairperson, for years now the DA puts free proposals on the table on how to make sure we live up to the slogan: Water is Life – Sanitation is Dignity

Minister just for once listen and implement the following four proposals from the DA:

- Appoint skilled, experienced, and accountable management and end political interference in the day to day running of water infrastructure;
- Implement the “use it or lose it” principal by transferring underperforming municipal water infrastructure to water boards;
- Enforce the “polluter must pay principle”; and
- Create opportunities for private sector partnership with government.

Maar vir nou Voorsitter,

Suid-Afrikaners is gatvol vir die swak dienste van die ANC.

Genoeg is genoeg.

Dit is tyd vir verandering.

Verandering na 'n DA regering wat dinge gedoen kry.

Ek dank u.