

SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR, CLLR. M MAPHETLE AT THE DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT ARBOR WEEK LAUNCH

03 September 2008

Programme Director

Hon MEC Ndleleni Duma

Honoured and Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Deadly fires in Kwa Zulu Natal, floods and storms in Cape Town residential areas as well threats of Hurricane Gustav in coast of Louisiana, New Orleans in the USA are just some of the news headlines that we woke up to this week. As I looked and listened to these headlines I was reminded of how much fragile the earth we live in and how much important it is to protect our lands, and this year's Arbor Week theme was even brought much forcefully to my mind.

I am therefore delighted to join the communities of Dr Kenneth Kaunda District here today not only to celebrate Arbor week, but also to remind ourselves how important it is to save our land by planting trees. It is during the Arbor Week that we draw our people's attention to the value of trees and the different roles that they play in our lives.

The theme for Arbor Week 2008 is “Plant a tree – save our planet” Under this theme we are highlighting four areas through which we need to participate.

Protect our indigenous forests

Only half of one percent of South Africa's land is covered by indigenous forests. These forests are a rare and important resource. They provide homes for animals, trees, plants, insects and birds. They are also very important to rural communities because they provide medicinal plants, building materials and fuel. Indigenous forests are sacred to many rural communities and they provide spiritual and cultural homes for many of our people. Indigenous forests also provide people with places for us to visit in order to get to know our natural resources. In this way they also provide the basis for tourism in many areas. We must do everything we can to ensure that these small and precious forests are protected and we need the help of all our people in doing that. Visit our natural forests and help us to protect them.

Help us to prevent veld and forest fires

Forests, particularly plantations, provide jobs and economic opportunities for many of our people in rural areas. The plantations serve important industries including sawmilling, pulp and paper and housing. The economic benefits of these trees are however threatened by fires.

Wild fires also affect other kinds of agriculture and land use. For the sake of our forests and all our rural areas I call on all of our people to help us to prevent veld and forest fires. You can do this by ensuring that fires are not made in the open during the dry season and by informing the authorities should you see a fire which may be out of control.

Green our homes

Trees in our cities, towns and settlements help to make our homes shady, green and dignified. This is the importance of Urban Greening. The quality of our lives is improved through clean air, noise reduction, storm water control and beautification of our surroundings. Some parts of district, especially formerly white areas are leafy and green. Others, especially townships and informal settlements are often bare. This mirrors life in South Africa, where as a result of apartheid, there have been great disparities of wealth, income and opportunities between black and white.

In the same way, trees have been more prevalent in the formally privilege areas than in the townships and even rural settlements. We need to turn this situation around because trees are colour blind and should be enjoyed by all our people. You can help by planting trees at schools, churches, in the street and at home. You can also work with your local government to promote tree planting campaigns.

At an environmental day celebrations in June this year the Council, through the Office of the Executive Mayor launched the Adopt – a – Park project. The purpose of the project is to begin the environmental activism and encourage members of the public as well as businesses and community based organizations to make a contribution to the efforts of preserving our environmental by identifying open spaces and street – sides where they can plant trees, lawns and generally greenify our city. The Arbor Week offers us all the opportunity to again contribute our part in this initiative.

Programme Director, distinguished guests, I would like to thank you all for your time and commitment in promoting the greening of our district. My special thanks go to the Arbor Week organisers including the staff of Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, the corporate sponsors for Arbor Week, staff of the Dr K Kaunda District Council as well as Tlokwe City Council.

I thank you all.