

**SPEECH BY Ms DIPUO PETERS, MP, MINISTER OF ENERGY, AT THE
LAUNCH OF THE SAFE ILLUMINATING PARAFFIN STOVES PILOT PROJECT:
EZINGOLWENI IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

19 OCTOBER 2009

Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize

The Executive Mayor, Cllr. Mpisi

MEC for Social Development, Mr Bonginkosi Radebe

MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dlomo

The CEO of CEF, Mr Mputumi Damane

Municipal Managers of both the District and the Local Municipality

Local Chiefs,

Councillors,

Ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to join the Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, and the rest of the provincial and local government in launching this project which is a direct response to one of the deadliest silent killers in country.

Paraffin has been used for generations by our people in this country. However, of late it has also assumed the unfortunate profile of leaving many people dead whilst they are using it and property has also been destroyed. This gathering therefore is a practical demonstration of how we intend to respond to this formidable challenge.

Even if you are not a keen television viewer or in this case a dedicated radio listener, you could never recall a winter that that has gone by without the ignominy of the fires and the associated gory pictures of men and women who appear on television to raise their voices about the fact that that have lost virtually everything they had collected under difficult conditions as a result of fire mostly arising out of the unsafe usage of paraffin. These fires occur mostly in the following areas: Alexandra in Gauteng, Imizamoyethu in the Western Cape, Bizana in the Eastern Cape as well as here at Ezingolweni.

The consequences of these accidents can be devastating to the families of the affected communities especially women and children. The hazards and the dangers associated with paraffin are issues of great concern to us as the Department of Energy. They point to an even greater problem of the lack of safe energy appliances and safe handling and usage of the silent killer of paraffin by especially disadvantaged communities.

One of the central planks upon which President Zuma has founded his administration is the issue of the importance of rural development. The government has developed a comprehensive rural development strategy which seeks to ensure that people in the rural areas are not left out – as is mostly the case – in the cold whilst development continues unabated in the metropolitan areas.

We cannot therefore look at rural development in isolation to the need to do the same to communities who live in areas such as Alexandra, Imizamoeyethu as well as Ezingwoleni. The communities here require proper housing, water, sanitation as well as electricity. They require the same services that are enjoyed by communities living in formal households.

When my movement, your organisation, the ANC adopted the freedom charter as its policy platform in 1956 after the charter itself was adopted a year earlier, it did so because this seminal document championed a society where the people shall not only govern but a country where the conditions of life of our people are improved for the better.

As the ANC led government we are not going to rest until we have broken the proverbial back of the cycle of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment that continue to define the life of what Sol Plaatje called the native life in our country.

Those of us who have been charged by the President to lead the energy portfolio have an onerous responsibility vigorously to implement the policy prescripts that emanate from the post *apartheid* ANC policy documents like Ready to Govern, the white paper on RDP, as well as the resolutions that have been taken at all the conferences of the ANC.

What we are here to do therefore is to launch a project that will ensure that the people of this area enjoy the kind of services that some people in other parts of the country take for granted. This is what sustainable development is supposed to be about.

The White Paper on Energy Policy – which draws inspiration from the ANC documents we referred to earlier - states that there should be an increase in access to clean, safe, affordable energy services. That therefore is the reason we are here today. We are here to integrate grid with non-grid technologies in a manner that will benefit local communities.

We are aware that *apartheid* defined the life of a rural woman as the one that should forever be centred on collecting firewood, fetching water from far away rivers, and even walking long and hazardous distances before any meaningful domestic activity could take place. We are here to put a stop to this *apartheid* like state of affairs.

Our intention is not just to ensure the provision of ‘clean and safe’ energy sources, but also to ensure that, this translates into real improvement in the quality of life of our people such as giving women and children the means to study and develop to their full potential.

Eighty percent (80%) of household energy in our country is used for cooking and space heating, and the most common sources that are used in this regard are electricity, paraffin and coal (especially in Gauteng and Mpumalanga – where coal is readily available). Some households use LPGas for these applications. However, the use of wood fuel (or biomass) is the most common in the rural areas and paraffin is the fuel of our communities in towns and the rural areas. For the non-electrified households, their energy needs are met by liquid and solid fuels.

My department has taken a decision to embark on this pilot project in order to eliminate dangers associated with unsafe paraffin appliances. Together with the municipalities and the Central Energy Fund we have decided to embark on a study targeting the areas, such as the ones I mentioned earlier, that previously reported devastating fires caused by the use of unsafe paraffin appliances.

The main aim of this pilot project is to test the robustness and safety of the newly designed stoves. We want to be able to see whether it will minimise incidents associated with the handling and the usage paraffin and its associated appliances. Accordingly, stoves will be distributed to selected households after-which interviews will be conducted so that we can, on an ongoing basis, monitor and evaluate the project.

The outcome of this pilot project will assist us in ensuring that going forward stoves that are sold in the country are a product of an acceptable standard and quality in terms of their safety.

Together with Ezingoleni municipality, through their ward councillors and ward committees, we selected about 150 households who will participate and benefit from this project. In selecting beneficiaries, from five wards, we were guided by the municipality's indigent policy. We considered households with very low income.

As part of the study, the identified households will each receive a two plate stove and 10 litres of paraffin per month, for three months. This will ensure that this project is implemented smoothly. The identified households will be supplied with bottles armed with safety caps, and the department of energy will conduct awareness campaigns and information dissemination initiatives to educate communities on paraffin safety.

Let us together ensure that our communities, here and elsewhere in the country, are able to cook and keep warm without being exposed to danger: both to their health and well-being. I would like to encourage all the participating households to use these stoves regularly so that we can gather enough information when we conduct the surveys during these three months. This will enable us, as the department, to take informed decisions with regard to the usage and handling of paraffin appliances going into the future.

The information gathered during this pilot project will also feed into the study that the departmental will eventually conduct to investigate the possibility of regulating the price of Paraffin. At the moment we only regulate the wholesale and the Single Maximum National Retail Price (SMNRP). This is a cap price (which means that nobody in the country is allowed to sell paraffin above the price that we have determined).

Finally, I would like to thank you and all the provincial colleagues led by the Premier for attending this important function. Most importantly, I want to express our appreciation to the community of Ezingolweni for agreeing to participate in this pilot study. My officials will provide you with regular feedback until the study is completed.

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