

Joint Statement from the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, Ms Lindiwe Sisulu, MP; the Chairperson of the Board of Umgeni Water, Ms Ziphozethu Mathenjwa, and King Cetshwayo District Municipality

Developments within King Cetshwayo District over the past Week

10th July 2020

As part of the fight against the proliferation of COVID-19, the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, Ms Lindiwe Sisulu, MP, has mandated water boards across the country to assist Municipalities that are Water Services Authorities (WSAs) to deliver water and related services to all citizens of the Republic. It is through the vision of sustainable water services delivery to all that Umgeni Water has signed a service level agreement with the King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM) in the North of KwaZulu-Natal.

This after the King Cetshwayo District Municipality decided not to renew the contract with the private water service provider and instead opted to partner with Umgeni Water to rehabilitate all the run-down schemes and provide high quality water to all communities.

Umgeni Water has more than 45 years of experience in provision of bulk water services in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and it currently provides bulk water services to more than 70% of the population of KwaZulu-Natal, with the major cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg being beneficiaries of high quality bulk water services supplied by Umgeni Water. The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government partnered with Umgeni Water to develop a Universal Access Plan, which is a blue print for water provision in the entire Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Umgeni Water is using its strong balance sheet to fund the Universal Access Plan study for the benefit of the citizens of KwaZulu-Natal, including KCDM residents. It is that blue print of water delivery that Umgeni Water will roll out through various infrastructure development projects in KCDM in order to ensure that, over time, the less reliable rudimentary schemes are decommissioned and replaced with sustainable, reliable and high capacity water schemes to meet current and future demands of the region.

Minister Sisulu has noted with concern violent protests and vandalism of municipal infrastructure in parts of the King Cetshwayo District Municipality following the decision not to renew the contract with the service provider.

“It is both highly regrettable and uncalled for that the people we serve, especially in this trying time of proliferation of the coronavirus and resultant COVID-19, have to suffer further hardship through deprivation of basic water services,” said Minister Sisulu.

“As the Minister with oversight on water and allied services, it is my greatest wish and desire that those who have instigated and are perpetuating the abhorrent actions of road blockades, protests and sabotage of infrastructure that delivers water to some communities in King

Cetshwayo District will stop, pause for a moment and think about the consequence of what they have resorted to. Innocent lives are being put at risk because of their actions.”

“Our Government has always, and continues to, encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. This also applies to those who appear to be aggrieved over the end of the contract. My Department’s doors are open and so are the doors of the leadership of KCDM,” added Minister Sisulu.

It is important that matters are put into proper perspective in order to correct disinformation and fallacies that are being peddled in some quarters that are directly or indirectly impacted by the latest developments. Umgeni Water, a State-owned entity, is one of the water services providers that responded with a detailed proposal for operation, maintenance and management of some existing secondary bulk schemes as a short-term intervention and with strategies for the medium-term and long-term, including elimination of rudimentary schemes. This was in line with the requirements of KCDM and it was a fair, transparent and competitive process, contrary to the claims being made by some in our communities.

The Ministry has been in discussions with the Chairperson of the Board of Umgeni Water, Ms Ziphazethu Mathenjwa, and it has emerged that good progress has been made with Umgeni Water beginning operations within the District. An agreement has been signed between Umgeni Water and KCDM, and Umgeni Water has deployed at least 30 of its technical staff as part of reconnaissance to determine needs and priorities in order improve water services provision. Once this exercise is completed, Umgeni Water will be armed with proper and reliable information, so that when it takes over there will be a proper plan to produce tangible action and results.

Minister Sisulu and the Chairperson of the Board of Umgeni Water, Ms Ziphazethu Mathenjwa, together with the Mayor of KCDM, Her Worship Cllr Nonhle Mkhulisi, the entire leadership of the District and the Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal, are committed to providing quality services to the people of KCDM.

Plans are in place to improve water services provision within the District, and this includes rehabilitation, refurbishment and upgrade of infrastructure and provision of new and ultra-modern infrastructure. Umgeni Water, its customers and other stakeholders are getting to a point where water backlogs – or difficult access to water that is below Reconstruction and Development Programme specifications – will be significantly reduced. This is a commitment that is made in the Universal Access Plan, and our caring Government will fulfil it so that equity in allocation of resources is achieved in our lifetime.