****

**SPEECH PRESENTED BY MR. P. BHEMBE**

**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

**SWAZILAND WATER SERVICES CORPORATION**

**WORLD WETLANDS DAY**

**8 FEBRUARY 2018**

**Honourable Minister For Tourism and Environmental Affairs**

**Principal Secretary Ministry For Tourism and Environmental Affairs**

**Swaziland National Trust Commission Board of Directors**

**Swaziland Environmental Authority Chief Executive Officer**

**Municipal Council of Mbabane Chief Executive Officer**

**Members of the Media**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Swaziland Water Services Corporation is honoured to be a part of this event. The Corporation as the mandated provider of water and waste water services in designated areas, predominantly urban areas, prioritises advocacy activities that highlight water issues. Wetlands are a vital component of the freshwater cycle. Their conservation and sustainable use must be an integral part of any solution to freshwater provision.

According to the Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), access to safe drinking water has improved from 67.3% in 2010 to 72% in 2014. However, due to drought impact, access to potable safe drinking water dropped by 6% between 2014 and 2017 with Shiselweni and Lubombo region having highest proportion of the population accessing water from unsafe alternative sources. The need for water storage cannot be overemphasized as witnessed in the recent Elnino drought. Storage of water in times of plenty, for use in times of scarcity, is essential because any gap between the demand and supply of water has wide-ranging implications. Water is stored in many components of the hydrological cycle, with groundwater reportedly the largest store of fresh water. SWSC appreciates that some types of wetlands can play valuable roles as “natural infrastructure” and can provide water storage capacity under certain conditions.

**Honourable Minister,**

Capturing and holding rainfall, retaining sediments, and purifying water, wetlands play a vital role in the water cycle. Wetlands are the providers of freshwater, both in quantity and quality.

When we talk about the quality of water in reference to wetlands, Swaziland Water Services Corporation has realised economic gains from the existence of the Hawane wetland that is upstream of the Hawane Dam. The quality of water that is sourced from Hawane Dam and treated at our Woodlands Water Treatment Plant is less turbid when compared to other sources of water. The unit operational costs are significantly lower than other treatment plants because of this.

**Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allocating freshwater to satisfy the needs of the three principal water users being agriculture, industry and domestic use - is an on-going challenge for water managers in most countries. It has been reported that available freshwater per capita is decreasing. While the world’s population has tripled, freshwater withdrawals increased over six times, reflecting massive urbanisation, growing dependence on irrigated agriculture and rising standards of living. SWSC believes that the source of freshwater, our wetland ecosystems, should be the starting point of all integrated water management strategies. Maintaining the health of wetlands to secure our sources of freshwater and much of our food is one of the fundamental keys to a sustainable resource.

**In conclusion Honourable Minister,**

Domestic use is said to claim 10% of all water withdrawals. Which is why SWSC continues to call for responsible and sparing use of water nationally but mostly by urban users.

I thank you