

South Africa urges water restrictions as dam levels drop

October 28 2019, by Cara Anna



In this Friday, Jan. 17, 2014 file photo, people cool off in a public pool in Soweto, South Africa during extreme heat conditions in parts of the country. South Africa's government is announcing water restrictions as reservoir levels drop and rainfall is not expected until December. Lindiwe Sisulu, the country's water and sanitation minister, says Monday, Oct. 28, 2019 that many parts of South Africa are facing water scarcities as summer arrives in the Southern Hemisphere and climate change brings hotter, drier days. (AP Photo/Denis Farrell/File)

South Africa's government urged people to restrict water usage Monday as reservoir levels drop and rainfall is not expected until December.

Many parts of the nation of over 58 million people are facing water scarcities as summer arrives in the Southern Hemisphere and climate change brings hotter, drier days, said Lindiwe Sisulu, the water and sanitation minister. Rainfall is becoming harder to predict and the dry season is more intense.

"There's no need to panic. We just all need to be prudent," she said. "I implore you all to use water sparingly."

South Africa's government says the country is one of the world's 30 driest nations. The city of Cape Town last year faced the prospect of "Day Zero," or the date when most taps would have to be cut off because of a long drought. Strict water rationing in the city of 4 million people managed to avert that disaster.

Now the country's commercial hub, Johannesburg, and the capital, Pretoria, are among parts of the country most at risk. The Vaal Dam that supplies the province encompassing both cities has dropped below 50% capacity, authorities say.

In a speech earlier this year, Sisulu laid out the stark problems that South Africa faces as its [water needs](#) grow. More than 60% of the country's [water supplies](#) go to agriculture, leaving only 27% for personal use, she said.

Aging [water infrastructure](#) and "huge financial mismanagement" pose a challenge. At least one-third of the country's 144 municipalities are considered by dysfunctional by water authorities, Sisulu said: "Our [water](#)

[management](#) is poor."

In 1994, after the end of South Africa's harsh racial segregation known as apartheid, the new government saw widespread inequality in access to water and declared water access to be a basic human right, the minister said, adding that the country has not made much progress since then.

"This is a shameful situation of a right we had declared so long ago," she said.

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