Democratic Alliance speech by

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More needs to be done to stop illegal dumping and pollution of Gauteng’s rivers

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Gauteng is drowning in pollution; our waterways, community parks, open areas, and living spaces are suffering because of natural and human-induced factors. As a province, we face many diverse environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, waste management issues, and rapid urban expansion.

Protecting the environment is a collective responsibility that involves individuals, communities, businesses, and all spheres of government. Addressing pollution will require regulatory measures, sustainable practices, and public awareness.

While climate change, invasive species, mining activities, and some agricultural practices contribute to pollution, illegal dumping and inadequate waste management are the core contributors to pollution in Gauteng.

Our rivers and open areas are littered as a result of improper waste disposal of solid waste like plastics and other non-biodegradable materials and industrial waste, including chemicals and other harmful by-products, causing harm to both residents and the environment.

Gauteng municipalities do not have the resources to deal with the scourge of illegal dumping. Many landfill sites are full or nearing capacity, and we are running out of space to dump legally. This has resulted in many residents and businesses resorting to dumping wherever they find an open space. Some closed sites have even been illegally reopened by cartel-like groups who charge to dump illegally and set fire to the sites at night to create more space, causing massive clouds of toxic air pollution.

There is a dire need to develop and enforce proper waste disposal and recycling practices for households, businesses, and industry. The township waste collection and disposal system needs to be addressed; otherwise, these areas will become overrun with waste and many negative side effects associated with it, such as disease, rodent infestation, and ground contamination.

This is where the Green Scorpions play a crucial role in investigating environmental offences, monitoring compliance, and, most importantly, enforcing environmental laws. However, this department is riddled with unfilled vacancies and is not capacitated to attend to all its responsibilities. A fully capacitated Green Scorpion is the province's first line of defence against pollution and should be a priority if we are serious about preserving the environment.

Many of the wastewater treatment plants in our municipalities are leaking copious amounts of untreated sewerage into our waterways and contaminating groundwater tables. They are not adequately functional. Gauteng municipalities should invest in infrastructure, including upgrading and maintaining wastewater treatment facilities. This will ensure the decontamination of our waterways and improve our environmental well-being.

As the late Nobel Prize winner and founder of the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai said, “The environment and the economy are both sides of the same coin, if we cannot sustain the environment we cannot sustain ourselves.”

It is high time that this department delivers on its core mandate by stopping illegal dumping and pollution of our rivers.

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