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NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH SYMPOSIUM 1999

The 1999 edition of the National Youth Symposium opened yesterday in Clarens in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, and is scheduled to last until 1 October 1999. South African National Parks (SANP) is once again very proud to host this annual event, which, since its inception in 1981, has evolved into an important forum for youth of Southern Africa to share their concerns about the environment.

The National Environmental Youth Symposium is preceded by a series of regional meetings at which participants address environmental problems specific to their regions. At both the regional and national meetings, youths share ideas for practical projects to address specific issues such as littering, pollution, medicinal plants and even teenage pregnancy.

South African National Parks takes the view that youths are the future leaders and as such they hold the key to the reconstruction of the fabric of society and the environment. The action projects youths engage in contribute to the protection of the fragile natural and cultural environments and stimulate a conservation ethic. The projects also allow participants to acquire specific skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, discipline, cultural awareness, and good financial management.

The meeting at Golden Gate will discuss, among other things, progress made towards fulfilling the pledges of the 1998 Mopani Environmental Youth Charter. These pledges reflected commitments youths made to national government priorities such as crime prevention, job creation, health promotion and poverty alleviation.

Participants in the 1999 youth symposium have been drawn from communities neighbouring eleven national parks, namely Addo, Augrabies, Golden Gate, Karoo, Knysna, Kruger, Mountain Zebra, Richtersveld, Tsitsikamma, West Coast and Wilderness National Parks. Youths from Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, and Namibia have also been invited to attend. Organizations such as the National Youth Commission, the UNESCO Associated Schools project and the Full Gospel church have promised to send representatives.

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