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World Meteorological Day 2026: “Observing Today, Protecting Tomorrow”

South Africa today, 23 March 2026, joins the global meteorological community and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in celebrating World Meteorological Day. This day commemorates the coming into force of the United Nations Convention on the World Meteorological Organization on 23 March 1950. This day reminds us of the vital importance of weather, climate, and water in shaping resilient societies. The theme for 2026 is “Observing Today, Protecting Tomorrow”. This theme speaks powerfully to our national experience over the past months as we confront intensifying climate-related disasters.

In South Africa, the South African Weather Service (SAWS) participates in several activities, including awareness campaigns and educational programmes that play a part in increasing public knowledge of meteorological and climate information.

South Africa is a semi-arid country, prone to severe weather events such as drought, extreme heat, heavy rainfall, flooding, hail, tornadoes and lightning, among others. Over the past few months, the country has experienced severe flooding in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, and more recently, heat waves in the Western Cape. The January floods were officially declared a national disaster, with more than 35 lives lost and extensive damage to homes, roads, and infrastructure. Events like these serve as sobering reminders that climate change is not a distant threat; it is a present reality affecting lives, security, and development.

This year’s theme emphasises the essential role of Earth observations in modern meteorology. Every reliable forecast depends on a global network of satellites, ocean buoys, RADAR systems, weather balloons, and ground stations that continuously monitor atmospheric conditions. These

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technologies are important for preventing fatalities, protecting property, and supporting different sectors like agriculture, aviation, and water management.

These Earth observation systems form the backbone of our Impact-based Early Warning Systems, disaster preparedness, climate and seasonal forecasting, infrastructure and agricultural planning, and risk reduction strategies at local and national levels.

On this World Meteorological Day, the SAWS reaffirms its commitment to:

- Strengthening the national observation network,
- Improving localised forecasting and impact-based warnings,
- Enhancing research into extreme weather patterns and climate variability,
- Supporting provincial structures and municipalities in building resilient communities, and
- Collaborating across sectors to protect lives, infrastructure, and the economy.

Our success relies on partnerships between the SAWS, government, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and municipalities, Disaster Management Structures, private sector stakeholders such as aviation, insurance, researchers, and communities. Together, we can ensure that observing today truly becomes the foundation for protecting tomorrow.

As we honour this important day, let us stand united in our efforts to observe diligently, act decisively, and prepare collectively. Our weather and climate challenges are great, but so is our resolve.

World Meteorological Day emphasises the importance of science and collaboration in understanding the Earth's atmosphere and preserving its future.

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