

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SALGA) AT THE INAUGURAL COUNCIL OF SPEAKERS, ETHEKWINI, WEDNESDAY, 16 AUGUST 2017

Programme Director, Speaker of eThekweni Metro, Cllr. William Mapena

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Members of the SALGA National Executive Committee

Speakers and Mayors

Invited Guests and Fellow South Africans,

Good morning,

We are gathered here today on the backdrop of the 5th anniversary of the tragic death of 34 miners in Marikana in the North West province. The painful events of the 16th of August 2012 were a serious indictment to our young democracy that must never ever be repeated – let alone to resolve labour disputes – when we have progressive labour laws in place.

Fellow Councillors,

Before we proceed with the business of the day, may we all please stand to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the Marikana tragedy, as well as their families.

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Programme Director,

South Africa also commemorates Women’s Month in August as a tribute to the more than 20 000 Imbokodos who marched to the seat of the then apartheid government at the Union Buildings to register their rejection of white supremacy and institutionalised racism.

The 1956 women certainly laid a firm foundation for the restoration of our birth right, freedom, and for the dignity of women. Their achievements have

further translated into the opening up of the leadership space to women. As local government, we salute the women of 1956.

Looking at the attendance of this inaugural Council of Speakers, it is clear that local government is leading in women empowerment. There is also a marked increase in the representation of women in parliament, government, the judiciary and other key sectors in both the private and public domain.

It is however at the same time sad to witness the rise in violence and brutality against women and children in South Africa. As per the call during my recent address at the Council of Mayors in Cape Town - it is time for all men to take collective responsibility for these shameful actions and declare that enough is enough.

I appeal to all men to rise and commit to do all that is in our power to stop these senseless and barbaric acts against women and children. As men and women in local government leadership, we must, support municipalities in adopting urban safety strategies and action plans, to enhance socially inclusive and participatory approaches that contribute to a safer and just space for all. We need these to build safer communities, and subsequently a healthy society.

Programme Director,

On behalf of the collective leadership of SALGA, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the eThekweni Metro for hosting this Inaugural meeting of the Council of Speakers.

As a new innovation, this Council of Speakers is the very first meeting of its kind, bringing together Speakers from across all provinces in our country. With the diversity and riches of knowledge, experiences and imagination vested in this collective body of Speakers, the Council of Speakers is also an opportunity for the SALGA NEC to get feedback, and thus enabling SALGA to become more effective in our advocacy work.

Let us use this platform to learn from one another, pool our experiences and share our local expertise to ensure that Municipal Councils are better run institutions. They must be set on improving the quality of life in villages, towns and cities across all corners of the country.

Fellow Councillors,

The world is changing rapidly, and at the same time, the world is in a constant state of flux - with globalization resulting in a similarity and

commonality of experiences across the world. In this shift, local issues are assuming a global character, with developmental challenges that are no longer just the experience of developing nations.

This then implores on us to ask ourselves, as local government leaders, how our sector can inculcate the spirit and essence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into our policies, everyday planning and programmes.

This can be done by using appropriate frameworks for implementation, monitoring and review with appropriate urban indicators for each one of the SDGs, including reporting. However, this can only be achieved if local government takes its rightful place and seat at the table where decisions are taken. Ours is to promote an inclusive government. This can only be realised through the following key interventions;

- Governance: This is about ensuring that local governments and cities are given appropriate legal and policy mandates to undertake their responsibilities of delivering services to the people. This simply means effective oversight systems must be put in place for the implementation of the National Development Plan.
- We acknowledge that successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda requires multi-level governance and partnerships with all stakeholders. But this then means that the implementation, monitoring and review of the New Urban Agenda and SDGs must be bottom up, and include all stakeholders. This can only happen if local government's specific capacity building mechanisms are in place and there is an intergovernmental commitment to support them.
- We must prioritise social inclusion and spatial equity by supporting municipalities to pursue socio-economic growth; and develop social housing integrated with people's activities, ecosystems and institutions. Poorly managed migration and urbanization place a serious strain on the supply of infrastructure and basic services in cities. This often results in "slumification" of some parts of our cities which can only be reversed through local economic growth and sustainable development.
- Recalling the Addis Ababa Action Agenda paragraph 34, local governments and cities should be supported in raising revenues. This includes our ability to directly access international funding with minimal constraints, of course, whilst being cognisant of the sovereignty of the State. This is also already a prioritised and key

output of the United Cities and Local Governments – the UCLG Presidency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having just outlined the necessary ingredients for building a capable and developmental local government, it is impossible to ignore the current topical issues confronting the local government sector.

There are currently a large number of municipalities who are unviable, which is due to structural policy and systemic problems. These problems continue to weaken local government in discharging its obligations. This is now manifesting itself in, for instance, the impasse between our member municipalities and Eskom on outstanding debt owed.

Given these challenges, it is of great concern to SALGA and our members that Eskom is effectively proposing a 27.9% increase in tariffs. This is a significant jump from the previous financial year's tariff increase of 2.7%. In this regard, a SALGA NEC meeting held on the 19th of July 2017 resolved that we must engage with ESKOM and NERSA to come to some amicable solution for all concerned. This decision includes taking legal action for a way forward.

Fellow Councillors,

Also fundamental in making municipalities viable is an urgent need to sort out some of the lingering challenges arising from the current fiscal framework. Some of these include, among others;

- The unsustainable and increasing debt owed to municipalities.
- The current fiscal framework which allocates a measly 9.1% to the local government sphere needs urgent reviewing.
- The remuneration of councillors has been neglected and requires further interrogation to ensure an equitable and fair system of remuneration for Public Office Bearers at local government level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As directed by the SALGA NEC, the SALGA Presidency has already had engagements with a number of stakeholders, including the Minister of COGTA, parliament and the remuneration commission towards a better remuneration dispensation for councillors. Any developments in this regard will be communicated accordingly in due time.

In closing,

It is important to point out that all the interventions I have just outlined can only materialise and make greater impact wherein people are at the centre of running municipalities.

This means Councils must either take direct interest, or intensify the involvement of people - using the Municipal Systems Act for guidance in this regard. The Act is specific that people are not merely recipients of municipal services, but constitute the Council.

To achieve higher efficiencies and sustainability in municipalities, residents need to be engaged in co-production programmes that are designed to make them active participants in the provision of municipal services in their communities.

This way, residents own municipal initiatives that will both fast track service delivery, and subsequently eradicate poverty, create entrepreneurial and job opportunities that can, in the long term, slow down the widening inequality gap in our society.

Thank you.