



Address by the President of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), Cllr Mpho Parks Tau, at the Forum of African Metropolises (FAM) Inaugural Meeting, Soweto

26 August 2018

Programme director, Mr Mpho Nawa,
Premier of Gauteng, Mr David Makhura,
Secretary-General of UCLG-Africa, Mr Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi,
Metropolis Secretary-General, Mr Octavi de la Varga,
Mayors and Presidents of metropolitan regions,
Members of the media, and
Ladies and gentlemen:

Allow me to take this opportunity to welcome you all to my hometown, Soweto, to our province of Gauteng, and to the Republic of South Africa.

This inaugural meeting of the Forum of African Metropolises (FAM) is an auspicious, timely and urgent gathering. It marks a major intervention in bringing together city leaders and decision-makers to identify the major structural challenges facing our cities and metropolitan areas.

At the same time, it provides us with a conducive strategic platform to recognise the available opportunities in our cities and city-regions.

This Forum is opportune since it enables us to finally speak with a united voice, as the Global South, to influence the African continent's developmental agenda, and indeed decisively impact on our respective countries' national governance frameworks.

The eventual policy statements we adopt at this Inaugural Forum will be critical in deciding the future of FAM.

In this regard, I add my voice of solidarity to the Co-President of Metropolis, Premier Makhura, for not only hosting us but for steadfastly championing metros and cities in the continent to share experiences and exchange best practices. Moreover, I express my full humble support to Premier Makhura's efforts, working with Mr Elong Mbassi and Mr de la Varga, to elevate the role of cities and city-regions in promoting economic development, inter-regional trade in the continent and maximizing Africa's youth dividend.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I preface my remarks in the background of the positive sentiments and commitments which came out of last month's High-level Panel Political Forum at the United Nations (UN). As you would know by now, this UN Forum marked a major milestone for local and regional government, since for the first time, there was an explicit recognition at the highest global multilateral level, that local government is the driving engine to implement the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

In the words of the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms Amina Mohammed, she said, given that "more than 4-billion live in urban areas today", the role of cities and city-regions cannot be overemphasized and the UN is therefore, "working to ensure that this twenty-first century United Nations system includes a new and innovative strategy to support and build the capacity of local governments."

Delegates and friends,

We are all familiar with the problematiques affecting our metropolises in, for instance, Accra and Addis Ababa, ranging from super-urbanisation, to infrastructure backlogs and lack of requisite financing frameworks.

How then can we dynamise our cities to keep pace with population growth and dwindling finance mechanisms?

I raise this question, among other seminal questions, since cities and city-regions are the biggest lever for shared economic growth and realizing the 2030 Global Agenda.

It is thus encouraging to learn that some megacities, like Lagos, are not waiting for their national government to effectively respond to challenges of uneven power distribution and supply. Instead, Lagos is beginning to emphasise its autonomy by putting in place measures to sustainably generate its own electricity so that it becomes independent from pressures and demands of the national grid.

This is a reason we call upon our respective national governments to actively support and capacitate cities and metropolitan areas with adequate resources because cities are more responsive to keeping pace with, for example, super-urbanisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe the theme of this Forum, *Inclusive Metropolitan Cities and City-Regions*, can be achieved by acknowledging the matrix of challenges affecting Africa, namely, spatial overcrowding, disconnection between and amongst ourselves and the high costs of public services such as affordable housing, transportation, and data connectivity.

As a recent report by the development economist, Somik Vinay Lall states: "African cities are closed to the world" and to each other. Instead, "cities in Africa produce few goods and services for trade on regional markets" (*African Cities: Opening Doors to the World*, 2017).

One imagines the sheer scale of advantages that can be leveraged if Africa cities, big and small, prioritise inter-Africa trade and economic cooperation between our respective regional blocs. For instance, the collective economic contribution of Mombasa and Abidjan remains untapped and not fully maximised since these are nascent centres for trade and logistics whether you are talking roads, air or sea travel.

Fortunately, our countries are making reasonable progress in agreeing to and ratifying the African Continent Free Trade Agreement. As you would may be aware, it is disheartening that comparatively speaking, according to the analysis of the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), inter-Africa trade stands low at a paltry 15% compared to Europe which registers 59% and Asia 51%.

Programme director,

The geopolitical significance of Djibouti for the reigning superpowers is well known; why then can't we capitalize on it for carrying our own benefited goods and services to foreign markets? Clearly we have to move beyond the so-called 'Dutch Disease' whereby we depend solely on our natural resources to the neglect of capitalising on manufacturing, agriculture and re-industrialisation.

Programme director,

When we say Africa has the largest youthful population that still remains untapped, it simply means we need to do more to maximise our cities as centres of innovation and economic agglomeration. The relationship between demographic dividend, economic growth and technological innovation is well and truly exploited in Kigali and Nairobi, for local benefit, with the examples of the legendary M-PESA model.

As you would agree, failure to convert our demographic dividend, through skilling and up-skilling, is most likely to result in Africa's demographic curse. Quite simply, failure to make full use of our youth blessing, through requisite education and training – in vocational training, entrepreneurship and in responsive fourth industrial revolution industries – will most likely result in a youth bulge characterised by high jobless youth, social anomie and mass discontent as we saw in North Africa in 2011 with the Arab Revolution.

In this regard, cities and city-regions are important levers in facilitating inclusive urbanism for the simple reason that Africa possesses, as agglomerate economies, what other continents and regions envy, i.e., our abundant natural resources and our young human capital.

Fellow delegates,

As such, the political and economic transformation of Africa is directly linked to, primarily, profiling and supporting cities and metropolitan cities. Undoubtedly, cities and metropolitan areas are seminal not only for generic country development but for continental integration which will enable us to achieve the SDGs, realise the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Climate Change Accord.

By integration I refer to the urgent need to connect and link our transport nodes, road networks, telecommunication centres, and trade routes so that our people can benefit from our collective advantages.

For example, it should be a source of indictment that people in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg spend more time journeying to work rather than generating value from economic activities.

As the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms Mohammed, said at the High-level Political Forum: "We need to get urbanization right." In large measure, this is dependent on inclusive and

integrated “national urban policies to ensure balanced territorial development, and urban design and land use planning to promote growth, climate mitigation, urban resilience and poverty eradication.”

In conclusion, the Forum of African Metropolises is uniquely positioned to systematically address the matrix of complex challenges our cities and metropolitan areas experience. It is a Forum that offers a platform to connect as a continent and mobilise our natural and human resources for benefit of our people and communities.

In the memorable words of the late former UN Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan: “To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there.”

I thank you.