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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SALGA) COUNCIL OF SPEAKERS (SCoS) CONCLUDES ITS BUSINESS IN MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, WELKOM**

The South African Local Government (SALGA) two-day Council of Speakers (SCoS) concluded on Friday at Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Welkom with various speakers calling for a renewed focus to make the 5th Local Government administration different from the negativity associated with the sector.

Delivering the keynote address Deputy Minister of CoGTA Thembisile Nkadimeng said the Municipal Speakers where meeting in a province dominated by a great potential but faced with serious delivery services; problems that are unfairly affecting the people.

“Out of 23 municipalities in the Free State, 11 were categorized as dysfunctional municipalities. Those 11 municipalities need our support and I call on the MEC of CoGTA in the province to support these municipalities, including the Matjhabeng Local Municipality”.

“The province is facing numerous service delivery challenges with municipalities in a dire state. Running sewage on the streets, poor water supply and mismanagement are all too frequent problems that unfairly affect our people,” Thembisile Nkadimeng said.

She added that the 2021 Local Government Elections saw a new chapter for local government, and this afforded an opportunity to get things right. “The big question was what have the councils done in the few months in office”, she quipped, cautioning the Speaker’s Offices in municipalities to desist from being mere “post office box” but instead to become centres of oversight in councils.

The SCoS deliberations placed the spotlight in Speakers in respective municipalities, charged among others with the essential responsibilities of overseeing good governance, public participation and sustainability.

Some key issues that require urgent intervention in the Free State province include:

- political instability impacting the effective functioning of administration;
- court cases by business organisations due to poor service delivery;
- lack of skills and capacity to provide legal support to municipalities on litigation cases;
- non-functional Wastewater Treatment Works and sanitation systems; as well as
- the need to eradicate the bucket system in some municipalities.



Key to the discussions was the deliberations on “managing coalition governments to enhance municipal governance and service delivery”. Several speakers gave input in how best to navigate coalition arrangements and calls for coalition-led councils to be regularised were made instead of depending only on the agreements of coalition partners. At present, coalition governments are not institutionalized and remain without proper guidelines.

Unpacking SALGA Framework for Coalitions Governments; SALGA Chief Operations Officer Lance Joel presented SALGA’s coalition government framework which came as a result of a collaboration with members of executive councils and tertiary institutions in November 2021. SALGA is now pushing for the framework to be promulgated.

Lance Joel emphasized that the purpose of the framework was to determine the parameters within which coalition partners can practice their coalition politics. Without a framework to guide political parties in structuring and managing coalitions, political parties and independent councillors are required to establish coalitions whilst being uncertain about the rules, this results in coalitions being unstable or short-lived. This is a common problem across the board, the SCoS heard.

SALGA’s framework proposes that coalition agreements should prescribe decision-making procedures and dispute resolution mechanisms that help with the ongoing coalition bargaining and conflict resolution.

The experiences of Speakers were that success of coalitions depends on intangibles such as humility, personal attitudes, political maturity, mutual respect and leadership styles.

SALGA President, Cllr Bheke Stofile said the 5th Local Government administration provides an opportunity to work on the modalities on how to change the negative narrative about local government.

Referring to SALGA’s recently launch civic-responsibility campaign, Asisho! Let’s say it, Cllr Bheke Stofile says “The Campaign is our resolve to speak about ourselves because the future of local government was depended on us”. The SCoS in Free State is the first session in the local government term at takes place in July, a month associated with celebrating Nelson Mandela's legacy.

Cllr Bheke Stofile said this was a moment for all to renew the values that inspired the great Nelson Mandela. "As we enter the 5th term of democratic local government there is no doubt that communities are frustrated and angry about the quality and quantity of basic services. This should therefore be a call on all of us to listen to what our people are saying," Cllr Bheke Stofile said.



On Friday, in one-panel debate on "Councillor Support Model, Systems and Remuneration" SALGA NEC Member and Chairperson of GIGR Working Group Cllr Samkelo Janda raised issues about the short courses being given to councillors. Cllr Samkelo Janda said the councillors should be afforded an opportunity to enroll to acquire formal qualifications to be a fallback when their term of office comes to an end.

Various calls were made for the standardization of the pension and medical aid benefits for councillors. Thembu Nkadimeng echoed these sentiments that it was incumbent for the state to take care and provide for its own agents. The calls for equal remuneration across spheres of government remain a going concern. Delegates question why Premiers could earn standardized salaries across the country irrespective of the provincial population, while Mayors and Councillors remuneration was not standardized and depended on various factors. Personal protection and safety of councillors also came under discussion in response to the thorny issue of political killings.

The SCoS serves as a forum through which Municipal Speakers consult one another in matters of common interest to improve governance and service delivery within the Local Government. It serves as a forum through which Speakers of member municipalities can consult with one another in so far as to contribute to ideas, advice, insight and support on matters directly affecting the role and function of the Speakers.

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