

## **Address at the national conference of the South African Local Government Association**

Cape Town, 29 September 2004

Chairperson,  
Chairperson and other leaders of SALGA,  
Deputy Minister for Provincial and Local Government,  
Honourable Mayors, Councillors, Leaders, and government officials from the various spheres of government,  
Honourable MECs responsible for Local Government,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Representatives of non-governmental organisations and community based organisations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Yesterday afternoon you were already engaged in the important work of this Conference. Unlike me, you therefore had no possibility to watch television.

Yesterday morning my colleagues and I in the national government had the privilege to meet with our national religious leaders, representing all faiths in our country. Because of the important matters on the agenda of the Working Group, the meeting lasted longer than intended, into the lunch hour.

As soon as it concluded, I went back to my office at the Union Buildings to watch television. I am certain that by now each of our important compatriots present here, our leaders in the critically important sphere of local government, looks forward to the day when he or she will be elected President of the Republic.

This would give them the chance to take off their shoes in the privacy of the President's office, and watch television in the middle of the working day, as other ordinary mortals, such as yourselves - and I must add, the honourable members of the media present here - attend to the important task of working.

In this regard I have been told that some in our media have very recently been involved in a strange debate evidently to answer the question - what happens when Mbeki goes!

I am told that in this context, two correct predictions have been made. One is that in 2007, the ANC will hold its next National Conference, which will elect the leadership of the movement, including the President. The second is that our country will hold its next General Elections in 2009, which will also mark the moment when Thabo Mbeki will have to relinquish his position as President of the Republic, as stipulated by our national Constitution.

Seemingly, these two correct predictions have led some to conclude that the time had come for public discussion to begin, to answer the question - who will succeed Thabo Mbeki! I think it is regrettable that none of our Mayors and Councillors seems to have been mentioned as potential successors!

In this regard, the only advice I can give is that the local government leaders present here have 3 years in one instance and 5 years in the other, faithfully to serve the people of South Africa so that they emerge from the shadows, and thus create the possibility to be identified by the media as potential successors to the President.

I am certain that the knowledge that one of the rewards of succession will be the possibility to watch television during working hours, will serve as an incentive to all of you strenuously to serve and be seen to serve the people of South Africa!

Recently I sat and waited until the early morning hours to listen to the nomination acceptance speeches of two of the United States Presidential candidates, Senator John Kerry at the Democratic Party Convention and President George W. Bush at the Republican Party Convention.

Yesterday afternoon I watched television to listen to the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, as he addressed the annual conference of his ruling party, the British Labour Party.

I would like to take advantage of this important occasion, the third National Conference of SALGA, to express our profound appreciation for the commitments the British Prime Minister and Leader of the British Labour Party, Tony Blair made, relating to our future as Africans.

With your permission, Chairperson, let me quote what he said.

"Britain is now, committed for the first time in our history to the UN aid target of 0.7 per cent. Next year as President of the G8 along with action on climate change, we will try for consensus on a new plan for Africa...not only on aid and trade but on conflict resolution, on fighting corruption, on the killer diseases Aids, malaria and TB, on education, water, infrastructure - a plan to lift that continent in hope and lift from ourselves the shame that so many human beings live and die in misery when we know together we could stop it; and when unchecked this misery some time, somewhere in the future will threaten us."

All of us here are acutely aware of the disparities and imbalances that exist among our municipalities, as, for instance, between our metropolitan and rural district municipalities. Similarly, we are perfectly sensitised about the disparities and imbalances within individual municipalities, as, for instance, between the historically black and the historically white sections within these areas.

We know what it means to have one area of a town developed and relatively wealthy, and another within the same town, underdeveloped and desperately poor.

As we reconstructed our system of local government, resulting in our current 284 large municipal areas, we deliberately sought to create the situation in which the areas that are developed and well off would, without impoverishing these, assist those that are underdeveloped and poor to catch up with these more prosperous areas that our painful history had defined as the disadvantaged.

Nationally, we have spoken of two economies within one country. We have said that we need to do everything possible to ensure that the First Economy, which is developed and integrated within the world economy, grows, prospers and helps to address the task of achieving the objective of a better life for all. We have put programmes in place and committed considerable resources to ensure that we achieve these goals.

We have also said we need to do everything possible to ensure that the masses of our people imprisoned within the Second Economy break out of their condition of underdevelopment, poverty and marginalisation. We have put programmes in place and committed considerable resources to ensure that we achieve these goals, depending essentially on a thriving First Economy to help us generate the resources that will enable to realise the objective we have set ourselves with regard to the Second Economy.

As we meet, important discussions are taking place within NEDLAC to implement the decision taken at the Growth and Development Summit to mobilise further resources within the private sector to ensure the success of the policy to develop the First Economy and transform the Second.

I am happy to report to this important National Conference that the NEDLAC social partners are going about their important work in a spirit informed by the new common patriotism, which is based on the

obvious truth that all of us, regardless of race, colour, gender and class, share a common national destiny.

All this indicates that the rich and the poor of our country are striving together to translate into practice the shared vision, that South Africa belongs to all of us who live in it, black and white.

In this regard, we must, in good time, produce the results we need to produce, of an equitable society and a better life for all, within each of our municipalities, between our urban and rural municipalities, and among all our people throughout our country, wherever they live.

All of us know that when I say all these things, speaking today in the City of Cape Town, I am speaking about confronting and defeating the legacy of domestic apartheid.

When the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, spoke yesterday in the City of Brighton, about the shame and the danger to the United Kingdom and other developed countries, posed by the reality that, as he said, "so many human beings (in Africa) live and die in misery when we know that together we could stop it", he was speaking about confronting and defeating the legacy of global apartheid.

Enough resources exist within human society which, if there was the will among those who control these resources, could help humanity to end the situation in which so many human beings in Africa and the rest of the world live and die in misery when humankind, together, can stop it.

We salute Prime Minister Tony Blair for what he said because the commitment he made to his Party, his people and the world, communicated the clear message that the will exists among important sections of the global political leadership to give real meaning to the noble ideal of human solidarity.

The important echelon of our leadership sitting in this hall has an obligation it cannot avoid, to repeat after Prime Minister Blair that it, too, will do everything that has to be done to lift the disadvantaged in our country in hope, and lift from our society the shame that so many human beings live and die in misery when we know that together, as a united nation, we could stop it.

We have no excuse to evade this responsibility because we know heartrending reality we face.

For instance, a weekend newspaper has reported about the problems experienced by the residents of Ezenzeleni Municipality in the Free State. It says that residents in this place "start queuing for water at 5am every day".

The paper says that: "Many like Maria Nkabinde (73) are elderly. There are only two municipal taps for the dozens of 'grannies' houses. ...One of the taps is broken. The other leaks and has been bound with blue nylon twine to stop the scarce water from draining away. Most of the people who live on this side are old."

Maria Nkabinde is quoted as saying that: "It's a long way to the taps. It's very difficult for me. My knees hurt and you have to wait a long time in the queue for water. You have to get there early because for three to four hours a day there is no water."

The report continues that: "In Ezenzeleni most houses have no sewage. Corrugated iron toilets in back yards use a bucket system. On Thursday municipal employees went from house to house collecting the buckets and emptying them into a tanker pulled by a tractor. It was the first time they had been emptied in two weeks."

The report went on to say that some of the toilets do not even have buckets. There are pits nearby where effluent is dumped. The clinic has been dogged by delays because wrong plans were submitted on

separate occasions. There were also concerns about the quality of work and defects in the design; that builders downed tools because their wages were in arrears; and senior municipal officials failed to attend meetings.

Other problems cited relate to electricity, roads and allegations of nepotism and corruption. The mayor of the municipality responded by saying that insufficient funding from provincial government lies at the heart of the problem and that the deterioration of services was compounded by an influx of people who had been evicted from the farms and he (the mayor) rejected accusations of nepotism and corruption.

(P4, Sunday Times, 26th September 2004)

I have quoted the article at length because the problems identified here, are a critical part of the challenges of our government today, especially local government. I hope that this conference will reflect on concrete problems like the ones in Ezenzeleni and that the delegates will offer practical and urgent solutions.

One resident of this municipality said: "South Africa is celebrating 10 years of democracy, but here we are not." This was a cry of despair, because nobody at Ezenzeleni desires a return to the days of apartheid oppression.

Of course, resources are limited and government continues to ensure that basic services do reach our people as urgent as possible. But still, why would stinking buckets not be collected for two weeks? Why are the taps not fixed? Has there been representation to the Department of Water Affairs about both the taps and the sewerage? Has the local leadership raised the problem with other spheres of government, and if so, what was the response? Is it true that councillors and officials don't attend meetings, and why?

All the problems I am raising beg the question whether SALGA can play a role and have the requisite capacity to assist in ensuring quality service delivery and accelerated transformation at the sphere of local government. This does not suggest that SALGA should assume responsibilities that rightly belong to elected representatives or municipal officials.

This Third National Conference must ensure that SALGA does what it must do to make the Association a powerful tool for the empowerment, capacitation and inspiration of local government.

Chairperson,

Arising from the problems that we have cited and the many matters that we know face local government, we should look at some key challenges facing this sphere of government.

First: Service delivery: we must get the basics right! It is important for local government to focus on the delivery of basic services to all residents. As we said in the Ten-Year Review, great strides have been made in this regard, with more than half of the poor now having access to basic electricity and water supplies. Yet, we have to ensure that, at all times we attend expeditiously to the problems identified by the article that we quoted earlier.

Second: We must respond to the local communities! Local government is the sphere closest to the people. As a result, residents interface more with this sphere of government than any other and bring a variety of concerns to the attention of our municipalities.

There are two challenges that this presents. The first one is that service delivery plans should respond to the needs expressed by people at the local level and respond on time to subsequent problems around services.

Existing legislation spells out minimum requirements of municipalities in terms of public participation, including communication, ward committees, consultation on such matters as IDP's, budgets and others.

However, many municipalities view this participation as an irritating compliance issue, rather than a necessary prerequisite for sustainable service delivery and accountable government.

Third: There is an urgent need to transform the apartheid landscape. With few exceptions, the apartheid landscape remains unchanged. Of course, this is the challenge for all spheres of government. New housing developments are generally located on the outskirts of towns and cities. We have not created opportunities to integrate previously divided communities.

Fourth: The issue of lack of capacity has been mentioned for many years as a reason for poor service delivery. I am aware that municipalities, SALGA and the national and provincial governments have taken some measures to address this matter. Yet, we still rely too much on consultants and other outsiders. I think it is time to move beyond relying on consultants, crisis interventions, and other interim measures and put in place effective senior management in municipalities.

Fifth: Resource and Financial challenges. Whenever we discuss the challenges of local government, the issue of insufficient resources always arises. Obviously, we need to pay particular attention to this matter, as we are doing. On the one hand, municipalities should make effective use of the resources at their disposal. This involves maximising their revenue base, collecting revenue that is due and ensuring that spending is efficient and focussed on the delivery of basic services.

On the other hand, there are resources in other spheres of government that can and should be harnessed. For example, local efforts to stimulate economic development should be co-ordinated with the provincial and national programmes so that the nation realises maximum value from the use of public funds.

Further, SALGA has to make an audit to assess whether the existing resources transferred to local government, such as equitable share transfers and infrastructure and capacity-building grants, are sufficient for municipalities to provide free basic services, fulfil their constitutional mandate, and improve the quality of life of the citizen.

Sixth: Over the past ten years there has been a move towards the decentralisation of service delivery to local government. However, many matters pertaining to powers and functions between the spheres of government have yet to be resolved. It would obviously not make sense to add responsibilities to a municipality that is struggling to deliver basic services, without ensuring that these municipalities have the human and capital resources to honour these responsibilities.

Seventh: We have started the deployment of community development workers. SALGA has a responsibility to ensure that there is effective harmonisation between these community development workers, the elected local public representatives, municipal officials and ward committees. The last thing we need is unnecessary competition and tension among government workers, whose collaboration should clearly ensure better, efficient and effective delivery of services to all our people. All these arms of government must work as a team.

Chairperson,

We have said previously that South Africa in 2004 stands at the confluence of major opportunities that arise from the First Decade of Freedom. We thus have an important opportunity at this point in our history to reflect on our mandate and performance as the local government representatives of our people.

Ten years of democracy has allowed us to deepen our gains and achievements in critical areas of social and economic development. This decade of freedom has also given us an opportunity to address weaknesses in our governance and service delivery systems and in our modes and styles of political leadership.

I am informed that you have chosen to convene under a Conference Theme entitled: Ten Years of Democracy - Towards a Decade of Accelerated Local Delivery.

I am certain that you recognise the implications of this theme as well as the important role of SALGA, which has statutory recognition in our country. In your last Conference, three years ago, you took significant decisions and committed the leadership of local government and its membership to, among others, do the following:

- Develop a strategy and programme for Organised Local Government;
- Affirm and support the provision of free basic services to communities;
- Embark on programmes to increase public participation; and
- Fight corruption.

I refer to these decisions, as I am certain that, three years after, this conference should be able to assess how far you have been able to implement those decisions.

In this regard, I hope that you will agree that one of the primary tasks of councillors is to intensify the levels of popular participation in local government affairs.

At the same time, we should enter into a people's contract with local communities and ensure that these communities bring their own resources such as social and human capital to local government.

In December 2000, our people elected over 8 900 councillors to serve in our 284 municipalities. Through our work, we should ensure that there is a direct positive outcome deriving from interaction between the largest cadre of elected political leadership and the radical material improvement in the quality of life of our people.

We have indicated before, that municipalities are at the coalface of delivery, and are an important front desk of government that should assist us to reach our strategic objective of reconstruction and development.

The elected representatives of local government must work together with those located in the national and provincial spheres, to implement our government-wide programme of action, as announced in May 2004.

We expect that under the leadership of our Mayors and Councillors, municipalities will initiate intergovernmental dialogue and agreements aimed at accelerating the implementation of the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs).

Chairperson and delegates,

I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to receive the resolutions of this Conference. Of course, it is the expectation of all our people that when the highest body of the local government leadership converge, it will help to sharpen community efforts to improve their capacity and political will to realise the peoples' contract for a better South Africa and Africa.

I thank you.

