

## **Address at the 10TH anniversary of the National Council of Provinces**

Cape Town, 4 May 2007

Chairperson of the NCOP,  
Deputy Chairperson of the NCOP,  
Honourable Premiers,  
Our Traditional Leaders,  
Representatives of SALGA,  
Honourable Members of the House,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank you most sincerely for the opportunity you have given us to be part of this important event in the history the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

As we meet to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the NCOP, which is one of the key institutions of our democratic state, we are inspired by the role that this House has played in the creation of a new South Africa, during the decade of its existence. This important role of the NCOP in the evolution of our young nation is reflected in the advances we have made in the deepening of our democratic system.

We meet here today shortly after our nation's celebration of both Freedom Day and May Day.

The main reason for our people to celebrate these days as they did in the past week is because these masses, working with our institutions of democracy, such as the NCOP, have helped to consolidate democracy, giving substance to our shared objective to attain for all justice and human dignity.

The people of South Africa enthusiastically marked these important days in our national calendar and thereby told a story of a people which has confidence in the democratic order, confidence that this democracy will continue to deliver the things that ensure a better life. These masses know that for our country to advance forward to a better future we should uphold the Constitution, the laws, values and ethos that characterise our freedom.

Through its work, the NCOP has helped to ensure that our people are able to look to the future with confidence, because they know this as a matter of fact that, since the dawn of democracy, their lives have been slowly but surely taking a turn for the better.

This palpable improvement in our people's living conditions attests to the determination of the NCOP and all our democratic institutions effectively to address the historical challenges that condemned the majority to a life of misery, marginalisation and indignity for a very long period.

Chairperson,

Those among the Honourable Members who were part of this House during its first term may remember what we said in 1998 at the NCOP conference on intergovernmental relations. Among other things we said:

"The NCOP, the product of the Constitution drafted by the elected Constitutional Assembly, is barely fifteen months old. By any standards, it is a mere infant which necessarily must suffer from teething problems.

"Accordingly, we meet here today to assist in the process of the growth of this important institution of our democratic life, the NCOP.

"But I believe that as we deliberate among ourselves ...,we must continue to be informed by the perspective which guided us as we drafted the Constitution which gave birth to the NCOP.

"Two of the most important principles, which were part of that perspective, were participatory democracy and co-operative governance. We came to these positions not because we were particularly bright or inventive, but because we wanted to address the specific circumstances of our country, in a situation in which we had the possibility to draw on the accumulated wisdom and follies of the rest of humanity, and because we emerged out of our own definite past."

In February this year the NCOP completed 10 years of existence as an institution that represents the provinces and the local sphere of government ensuring that the interests of these two spheres of government also have a voice with regard to national matters.

In effect, the existence of the NCOP means a better system of representing the interests of our people.

Honourable Members, this House is a particularly unique creation in our constitutional system of democracy since it is transversal in character, stretching across the three spheres of government.

It is at the cutting-edge of intergovernmental relations and serves to entrench co-operative governance across the three spheres of government as mandated by the constitution.

It is a vital bridge in our democracy, straddling and drawing together South African citizens on the one hand and the legislatures, the executive and administrative organs of the state on the other.

Accordingly, ten years after the inception of this House, the most logical thing to do is to ask ourselves whether the NCOP has achieved its key objectives and realised its strategic vision, to assess the impact of its programmes and to draw the necessary lessons for the future.

One of the teething problems we were concerned about in 1998 was the lack of appreciation of the role and mandate of the NCOP. The question as we meet today is whether, the NCOP has managed to address the misunderstandings that may have occurred among our people about the role and mandate of this important House.

In this assessment, we must also evaluate the oversight role of the NCOP and candidly assess the impact this House is having on the development and reconstruction of our country, especially with respect to the manner in which provinces and municipalities implement programmes designed to push back the frontiers of poverty.

Understandably, one must presume that the NCOP would take advantage of this remarkable opportunity in its history to mark its achievements and to engage with identified or new challenges.

In this regard, I am informed that, as part of the preparations for this important event in the history of the institution, there has been some internally detailed work by the NCOP to look into the role it has played with respect to the following:

- intergovernmental fiscal relations;
- social transformation with a focus on education, health and social development; and,
- socio-economic development with specific regard to integrated development planning and small business development.

I am certain that the outcome of this review process would provide members of this House with an indication of how far the NCOP has gone in terms of realising its mandate as far as its contribution towards the betterment of the lives of our people is concerned.

Shortly after this House was established, one of the challenges you faced was to refocus the work of the institution to ensure that its operations are consistent with the role and mandate expressed in the Constitution.

The Constitution states your role as being to represent the provinces to ensure that provincial interests are taken into account in the national sphere of government.

The NCOP does this mainly by participating in the national legislative process and by providing a national forum for public consideration of issues affecting provinces.

Has this been effective? Is the NCOP able to make the necessary interventions as mandated by the provinces, or is this House seen as a poor cousin of the National Assembly?

I think it is important for this House to look at some of the issues that are often viewed as inhibiting the institution in terms of its work and regarding the challenges of raising its public profile.

Some of these weaknesses could be legislative while others may be institutional.

The question is whether an interrogation of these issues will help you identify some of the challenges to put the NCOP in a better position to play its role in a more meaningful way.

I understand that this House has established a special commission to explore and debate these institutional and legislative matters and I trust that this exercise will benefit all of us.

When doing this, the NCOP has to have a better understanding of provincial views when considering matters before it and ensure that these views are correctly represented.

I am very happy that the NCOP has responded very well to the challenge of participatory democracy with your programme of ensuring that our public representatives are rooted in the constituencies that have elected them. In this regard, this House has correctly introduced a provincial week, during which Members of the provincial delegations in the NCOP visit their respective provinces to work at the local level, together with their counterparts in the provincial legislatures.

This democratic system of governance, of taking parliament to the people, has yielded positive results, enabling the masses of our people to interact with their government, to raise issues of concern and suggest ways and means to address their local challenges.

In addition, it has enabled Members of this House to experience the actual conditions of ordinary people in local communities and articulate them during interactions both at committee and plenary levels.

Chairperson, I trust that this has helped with the task of understanding and consolidating the work of the NCOP in a much more focused way.

We are indeed proud, despite the work that still needs to be done further to consolidate our democratic institutions, that the NCOP has, through this form of interactive governance, further deepened our democracy, for the benefit of all South Africans.

We have maintained from the beginning of the democratic state that accountability and responding to the needs of the people would be strategic features of our system of governance, with these values readily embraced by our public representatives.

Consistent with this the NCOP also initiated one of its important programmes by developing the programme of Taking Parliament to the People.

Again, this was a demonstration of our duty as public representatives to facilitate public participation in Parliament and ensure that our people have full knowledge of the work of the NCOP.

I have seen the overwhelming grassroots response to this initiative as evidenced by the huge number of participants among ordinary citizens during your sittings in different parts of the country.

Indeed, the enthusiasm which your programme has generated among our people and the need for further involvement of our communities in our democratic processes, confirms the fact that our democracy matures every day.

I am certain that through this programme this House has been able to:

- Inform citizens about the work of Parliament;
- Provide citizens with an opportunity to see Parliament in action and be able to speak to its Members, and Members of the Executive, directly;
- Make citizens aware of the impact that public participation can have on political processes; and,
- Enhance the ability of the NCOP to oversee the implementation of national policies and programmes.

Further, I understand that this House has adopted what it calls Programme 2009, to achieve the following objectives:

- Increased oversight work that is guided by inputs from the provinces and local government regarding their needs and interests;
- Promotion of public participation with a clear impact on service delivery and the work of Parliament;
- Improved support to local government through closely monitoring government programmes at the municipal level;
- Improved intergovernmental relations as a result of the NCOP's sustained contribution to building the system of co-operative government.

I am confident that this programme will further ensure that the NCOP continues to occupy a central place in the on-going evolution of our democracy.

Chairperson,

A survey conducted by Markinor and the University of Stellenbosch in November and December of last year found that ninety-five percent of the citizens of this country are proud to be South Africans. These people also believe in democracy as a system of governance and have confidence that our democracy will develop positively in the future.

According to the survey 19 out of 20 respondents said they were either 'very' or 'quite proud' to be South African.

Our people would not assume this positive stance if our country was evolving in a wrong direction. I am pleased to say that all of us are proudly South African partly because of the quality of our democracy, towards which the NCOP has made an immense contribution.

As we know, the NCOP came into effect on 6 February 1997, following the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa by the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996. This is the constitution whose implementation has made the overwhelming majority of the people of this country to be proudly South African. It is a constitution that the people of this country are confident will guide this country today

and in the future. This is the constitution that all of us, members of the NCOP, and all the citizens of this country are prepared to defend at all times.

As we celebrate 10 years of the existence of the NCOP let us pause to reflect hard on the road we have travelled.

The challenges ahead of us oblige us to draw important lessons from the 10 year experience of the existence of this National Council, the better to clarify our vision, redouble our efforts to accelerate the process of socio-economic transformation to attain the goal of a better life for all.

Thank you.