

ADDRESS TO SALGA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, DURBAN

30 AUGUST 2011

ADDRESS BY TREVOR A MANUEL, MP

MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Programme Director; Mr Obed Mlaba;

Chairperson, Mr Amos Masondo

Your Worship , Mayor Nxumalo;

The Honourable, the Premier, Dr Z Mkhize

The Honourable, Minister Nathi Mthethwa

Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Distinguished Members of the SALGA National Executive Committee;

Aldermen, Councillors;

Distinguished Delegates

I want to express the sincere appreciation of the Presidency for the opportunity to address this august gathering. President Zuma has asked me to convey his sincerest apologies since his schedule of international engagements has prevented him from meeting his obligations to SALGA. I know that he will take our best wishes and feelings of empathy to the Norwegian people, who are still battling to overcome the effects of that deep man-made tragedy that befell them just 5 weeks ago.

The task of development is to work tirelessly for the development of our people, the built environment, and the entire infrastructure – both rural and urban – on a basis that is sustainable. One obvious metric of a successful outcome is the living standards of all South Africans, measured on a path that would be continuously upward. The responsibilities for development are carefully crafted into the entire mandate of local government – and so it should be – but development is hardly an exclusive competence of local government. One small

contributor to the developmental imperative into the future will increasingly be the National Planning Commission.

In May last year, the President inaugurated the National Planning Commission. After the elections in 2009 a Green Paper was developed for the establishment of the National Planning Commission, it was then debated and passed through Parliament. Thereafter a search ensued for competent South Africans to comprise the Commission. The President opted for a unique composition, with the Minister in the Presidency being the only executive member of the NPC, and 25 others drawn from civil society and the professions.

The president set the Commission on its way with an incredibly bold speech, in which he said,

The National Planning Commission will revitalise the work of government. By drawing on the best available expertise, the commission will be able to identify and confront challenges head-on. Government has often taken a sectoral and short-term view that has hampered development. Taking a long-term and independent view will add impetus, focus and coherence to our work. This will no doubt lead to an improved performance in

government. By involving wider society in its work it will rally the nation around a common vision.

This statement is born of a great deal of confidence – expressed by the commitment to invite input from South Africans outside of government in order to impel development forward and to ensure that the country has a public check on the forward advance. So the mandate of the National Planning Commission is clear. Commissioners have taken both the confidence that the President expressed in their appointment, and the tenor of his inaugural address to heart. Essentially what has been requested is to develop a long-term vision – 20 years is what was asked – and to mobilise the nation around that vision; and the NPC was requested to be independent and critical.

The NPC is in a position of privilege when tackling the task of developing a Vision and Plan to 2030, since it is not affected by electoral cycles in the same way as elected public office bearers tend to be. Towards a Vision, the NPC released initial elements for discussion. These elements are drawn quite extensively from the Preamble to our Constitution, which in turn draws on the tradition of the Freedom Charter.

The elements of a Vision are:

- A democratic state, rooted in the Constitution, working with all sectors of society to improve on the quality of life;
- People united in diversity, recognising our common interests; greater equality of women;
- High-quality education and health-care; adequate housing, water, sanitation, energy and transport, giving impetus to human development;
- A system of comprehensive social security that covers all citizens in need;
- Natural wealth harnessed sustainably, protecting our environment, using science and modern technology to ensure a growing economy that benefits all.
- People who are able to work have access to jobs, that workers' rights are protected and the workforce is skilled;
- Business is afforded an environment to invest and profit while promoting the common interests of the nation, including decent work;
- An efficient state that protects citizens, provides quality services and infrastructure and gives leadership to national development;

- Individuals and communities embrace mutual respect and human solidarity; and
- Government, business and civil society work to build a better Africa and a better world.

In the release of this outline, we urge all of our people to read, engage, to differ or confirm, but in all instances to respond to the NPC with comments.

Alongside the Elements of a Vision Statement, we released a detailed diagnosis of the major challenges confronting South Africa. In fact, in order to appreciate why the nine challenges have been selected in the diagnosis, we restate our strategic objectives – the elimination of poverty and the reduction of inequality, as the leitmotif of all of our efforts. Presumably, if one were to disagree that these are indeed the paramount strategic objectives, then nothing that follows will make sense. Of the Nine challenges, we highlight two as pre-eminently in need of priority attention. These are firstly, that too few South Africans are employed and, relatedly, that the educational outcomes are so poor that labour absorption is exceedingly difficult. The other seven challenges listed are – the high disease burden; the unevenness of public services; the resource intensity of our economy; the crumbling infrastructure; the

divisions that still beset communities and our nation; corruption, and spatial settlement patterns that marginalise the poor

Let me cite the last-mentioned as an example. Apartheid spatial patterns still dominate the everyday lives of all South Africans. It is very present in the continued existence of what was once “black-spot removals” to areas far from places of work – in many respects, the geography of Tshwane is all about these features, including the unbelievably long distances commuted along the Moloto Road; but it is also present in the continued retention of what were once Group Areas that tend to lock in the poor and unemployed, without the prospect of income or even the fares to afford the transport to go and look for work. Tragically, it is also very much present in many of the new housing developments that have mushroomed since 1994, with the poorest being geographically most marginalised. This is a pattern we must develop a heightened consciousness of, in order to change it.

Of course, the plan that we will release in November will speak to all of these challenges in much greater detail.

The origins of this perspective are in the Preamble and Founding Provisions of our Constitution. We are privileged that our Constitution is loaded with the most outstanding values that bind us together and

commit us to action. Yet, we tend to act as though these foundations do not exist.

But when we initiated this work as the National Planning Commission, we did not for one moment consider that the remit is focussed on the national sphere of government. We are exceedingly mindful of the fact that the responsibilities of the three spheres are interdependent and inter-related. Similarly, we have fine-combed Chapter 7 of the Constitution to ensure that we can reinforce the efforts and developmental character of local government. And we find that we should endeavour to so define co-operative governance as to be seamless across the spheres.

We have had to revisit the source of the Constitution, the Freedom Charter. Even at this gathering, comprising of a highly informed and motivated cadre, it is worth repeating the clause “There shall be Houses, Security and Comfort”. Lest we forget, it reads,

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed and to raise the families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space shall be made available to the people;

Rent and prices shall be lowered; food plentiful and no-one shall go hungry;

A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;

Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;

Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting playing fields, crèches and social centres;

The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all;

Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished, and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

Each time I read the clause, I marvel at the foresight of those who gathered 56 years ago to consider the future. Each time I undertake such an examination, I find myself asking whether we are worthy successors of the drafters of the Freedom Charter.

Our efforts or at least the intentions thereof, are not themselves without merit. The terms of the Municipal System Act that bind all of us to a

developmental orientation, to community participation and to integrated development are very strong. I do, of course, have a concern about the requirement that confine the term of an IDP to the electoral life of that municipality. We must appreciate that the nature of the developmental challenge is complex. Firstly, we might ask whether all of the issues contemplated in the clause of the Freedom charter quoted above should not feature together in our development plans to live up to their “integrated’ character? Secondly, we need to be conscious that the varying levels of development, even within the boundaries of a single municipality, are frequently so starkly uneven as to require a long-term intervention. Thirdly, we need a high-level consciousness of the fiscal constraint and the need for an emphasis on both maintenance and new infrastructure alike. Fourthly, we are required revisit and re-emphasise that Chapter 3 of the Constitution was written to compel co-operation so that no single sphere of government can step aside from responsibility and argue that the exclusivity of the function requires such sphere to stand aside. And fifthly, many of the challenges that arise from apparent service delivery failures could be significantly minimised if the loop of “participatory governance”, as provided for in Clause 16(1) of the Municipal Systems Act is consciously and repeatedly closed.

Our collective emphasis should thus be on longer-term planning with interim performance criteria; on counteracting the institutional fragmentation that bedevils so much of what we do, and on government that is accountable to the electorate for what it does and how it arrives at decisions, especially in the sensitive areas such as supply chain management.

From the perspective of the National Planning Commission, we would want to be true to the spirit in which the President has mandated us – “The establishment of the National Planning Commission is our promise to the people of South Africa that we are building a state that will grow the economy, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of our citizens.” In order to fulfil this promise we must invite local government into a deep and durable partnership. The National Planning Commission can, at best do high level strategic planning, but that will be barren without an active dynamic energy from local government engaged in the terms of the Municipal Systems Act, doing the detailed, bottom-up planning.

Let us not for one moment believe that this will be easy. We are bound together by choice and without any prospect of opting out. We must remain conscious of the fact that development is always an expression

of values. Development is not merely a technical exercise, and it is criminal to hand development responsibility to those whose only interest is to maximise their returns at the expense of the poor.

Development is an endeavour that requires the direct involvement of elected representatives who will remain accountable for the decisions they take, because these decisions always have a deep bearing on the quality of life of citizens. Our best efforts must be measured against the foresight of the drafters of the Freedom Charter and the insights of the drafters of our Constitution. We have no room for failure.

We wish you our very best for a conference whose success will be measured in a new practice that will touch the lives of our people long, long after your newly-elected Chairperson has closed this watershed conference.

Thank you very much.