



Speaking notes of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) President, Councillor Mpho Parks Tau, at the Common Action Forum, Johannesburg

Theme: *'Does Urbanism Expand or Limit Political Spaces'*

11 November 2018

Salutations

Distinguished guests, and
Ladies and gentlemen

All Protocol Observed:

Introduction

I am honoured to deliver the opening remarks at the 2018 Common Action Forum (CAF) and to specifically reflect on whether *'Urbanism Expand or Limit Political Spaces'*.

The question is significant given that this year's Forum is hosted a stone-throw from the Constitutional Hill, the central location for South Africa's progressive Constitution which came into effect on 04 February 1997.

As you know, our Constitution boldly declares in its Preamble that, "every citizen is equally protected by law".

Chapter 2 of the RSA Constitution clarifies that the promotion and protection of citizens' human rights resides with the state to ensure all citizens' socio-economic rights are attained in a progressive manner.

Socio-economic rights

As a representative of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the sphere of local government is fundamental to the delivery of socio-economic and political rights.

The right to a dignified life mandates the local government sphere to guarantee the citizens and communities have access to quality service provision of electricity, sanitation, housing, healthcare etcetera.

Equitable spatial planning requires a balance between addressing the legacy of apartheid morphology and responding to inclusion of the poor and marginalised to opportunities and amenities.

The pursuant of these socio-economic rights to all citizens and residents have to be accomplished in the background of:

- Inter- and intra-migration to urban centres where opportunities are concentrated,
- Climate- and conflict-induced migration into countries and cities where common goods are available,
- Diminishing resources to finance public services and meet expanding demands placed on the sphere of local government, and
- Where there's intense competition amongst the poor for scant resources and opportunities.

Inclusive urbanism

My personal political philosophy is informed by David Harvey's *right to the city* thesis which implies the following 5 elemental rights:

- 1) the *right to developmental service delivery* whereby citizens, residents and migrants are active participants in ensuring there is efficient service delivery;
- 2) the *right to spatial integration* endeavouring to promote safe, reliable and accessible mass transit systems;
- 3) the *right to a liveable city* informed by the understanding that, to quote Harvey, "the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be";
- 4) the *right to inclusive economic growth* by creating economic opportunities; &
- 5) the *right to remake ourselves* premised on Amartya Sen's capabilities approach that citizens engage on the basis of their needs and on the basis of their capabilities.

A positive practical outcome of inclusive urbanism and political participation was seen in the recent US midterm elections, where for the first time, voters chose as their leaders, Muslim women, Native Americans and LGBTQ candidates.

Inclusive urbanism and political spaces

The inclusive paradigm sketched above presumes not only engendering the attainment of socio-economic rights but the progressive opening up of political spaces.

Unfortunately, two phenomenons have taken place in societies dealing with multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-national questions.

First, the criminalisation of poverty where the material conditions of the poor disadvantages them from accessing opportunities and amenities readily available for other class formations.

Second, competition for scarce resources amongst those that Franz Fanon terms, the 'wretches of the earth', quite often leads to incidents of intolerance, discrimination and Afro-phobia.

It is thus incumbent on all social partners – in government, business, and civil society formations – to endeavour to increase spaces for opportunities, education, reskilling and entrepreneurship not only in cities but especially in townships and informal settlements.

Inclusive urbanism is therefore an All-of-Society-Approach.

Exclusive urbanism and closure of political space

Failure to do this creates space for populist political mobilisation that exploits migrants and refugees as scapegoats for lack of opportunities of native populations.

Since the overall theme of the Forum for this year is on, *Global Racial Polarisation and the Rise of Right-Wing Politics*, the causes of antagonism against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is important.

It is unproductive to argue that external mass migration is due to porous borders and inefficient policing mechanisms.

Instead, what is central is the need for systematic documentation and administration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

It requires proper public policing and planning of migration and registration framework.

In the final analysis, those adversely affected by lack of proper planning and administration are the poor and marginalised, whether citizens or refugees.

Lack of proper planning and administration – of both domestic and foreign migration – results in worsening, amongst the already-poor, their material conditions of moving from abject poverty to relative prosperity.

And with lack of proper planning, prejudice and stereotyping rear their ugly heads.

As Nelson Mandela said, “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love”.

As a representative of the Global Network of Cities and Local Government (UCLG), the role and importance of local government is critical for the following factors:

- Local government is the sphere of governance closest to the people and best understands people’s challenges.
- Local government is a key livelihood enabler for those at the bottom of the pyramid.
- Local government is seminar for effective service delivery which is about addressing the problems that come with high-density urban and peri-urban environments.

Growing political space by inclusive urbanism

Expanding political space – for all whether citizen, refugee or asylum seeker – hinges on the following supportive interventions:

- Mobilising all of society against the rearing of nascent acts of racial discrimination and ethnic intolerance such as today’s CAF platform involving NGOs, international partners, the media and youth formations.
- Marshall our respective institutions to actively participate and mark solidarity with the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda (NUA), the Paris Climate Change Accord.
- In an era of a post-truth or alternative facts where ignorance and bigotry reign, the words of Kofi Annan ring true that: “Our mission, therefore, is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity.

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