

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SALGA) AND THE UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (UCLG) NETWORK, MR PARKS TAU, AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN CULTURAL OBSERVATORY 2017 NATIONAL CONFERENCE, NEWTOWN, 24 MAY 2017

Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture in Sierra Leone, the Honourable Adrian Dixon
Fofanah

Nelson Mandela University Professor and the CEO of SACO, Prof Richard Haines,
Business Arts South Africa CEO, Ms Michelle Constant

Esteemed delegates to the South African Cultural Observatory 2017 National
Conference

Arts and culture Practitioners

Members of the academia

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is with great pleasure and honour to welcome you all this morning to the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) 2017 National Conference which is hosted in Johannesburg, South Africa, from today. Having attended the 2nd United Cities and Local Government (UCLG)-ASPAC Summit on Culture in Jeju, South Korea, just over a week ago, it is such a coincidence that the SACO is also convening its second national conference. This alone is telling of the significance of culture in our lives, our environment and most of all – the sustainability of future generations.

This year, the theme of the 2nd UCLG Culture Summit was Commitments and Actions for Culture in Sustainable Cities. This Culture Summit looked at how we may

best promote the principles of Agenda 21 and Culture 21 to build cohesive societies through the medium of culture. This is particularly necessary in the global South, where social fragmentation has become a by-product of globalisation.

It is widely acknowledged that culture is an expression of our relationship to others and to our environment. The preservation of ways of being, the sustainability of people-driven and people centric approaches to development, should also serve the tasks of preserving memory and allowing us to creatively co-create our environments and public institutions. In South African, it is this end we are enjoined to collectively pursue if we are to attain the objectives of the National Development Plan as a nation.

Internationally, in pursuit of the UCLG global agenda, the Bogota Commitment was adopted at the UCLG congress in October last year. This commitment morally obligates us – particularly the local government sector - to promote active cultural policies to guarantee the right to culture for all. In the absence of culture, which is the fourth pillar of sustainable development - alongside the economic, environmental and social pillars – this important element of humanity may unduly suffer from a lack of popular ownership by ordinary citizens. It is the notion of comprehensibility we should pursue, to ensure that culture becomes the centre from which we advance the sustainable development of our cities – and subsequently our nations.

Building a broad coalition of partners around cultural issues in development will assist our communities in understanding the progress we are making in creating a global society which is anchored on a profound respect for the individual. This

respect must be demonstrated in how we appreciate the context in which ordinary people pursue their own development in relation to others. In the absence of an understanding of culture, we decontextualize the individual and undermine the meaning and respect attached to individuals and cultural perspectives of development.

Locally, the South African Cultural Observatory has the potential to demonstrate how effective we have been in ensuring that the relationship between people and their environment are positively impacted by human endeavours, and to provide evidence when contrary. In support of the cultural context of people, the creative economy is perhaps the most effective way of building a common vision for the future, and providing the social cohesion required to advance the development of nations. But first, the cultural sector requires significant policy investments as it is a skilled area of the economy with a potential to create decent work and sustainable opportunities for many citizens.

It is broadly acknowledged that cultural work contributes significantly to the economy. However, we cannot pursue development in this sector without understanding the upstream and downstream implications of new technologies on the growth of the economy and the development of our communities.

Presently, cultural work supports the tourism industry, as well as the hospitality trade with cultural precincts - forming in traditionally under-serviced areas of South Africa. The revitalisation of culture in the country has had a significant impact on the

livelihoods of thousands of South Africans, particularly around heritage sites. Some examples of these sites include places like the Mapungubwe in Limpopo, Vilakazi Street in Soweto and Constitution Hill, which is just around the corner in Braamfontein.

For us to proceed with certainty, we need to understand how culture interplays with our environment, economy and society. We need evidence to guide and craft policy interventions that will shape the role of culture in pursuing development – particularly in cities where citizens interact more with their environments on a day to day basis. The hosting of the SACO two-day conference is no doubt a demonstration of the organisation's commitment to actively lead this agenda from the fore – and I can safely say – local government, both in South Africa and across the globe, is indeed behind you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to finally wish all of you a successful conference that will see all of us move closer to realising our common objective to build cohesive societies through the medium that is culture.

Thank you