

Address of the Premier of Mpumalanga, Mr.Thabang Makwetla, at the National Council of Provinces KwaMhlanga Legislature

14 March 2005

Honourable Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the NCOP
Honourable Members of the NCOP
Chairperson and members of SALGA
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered here today as servants of the people in order to once again give meaning to our commitment that we are a government that is in daily and respectful contact with the people. Contact that enables us to listen to the people, investigate the problems and challenges that they encounter, and assess the progress or otherwise of the advances we have made in creating a better life for our people.

Allow me Chairperson through you to convey on behalf of the people of Mpumalanga our warm welcome to the National Council of Provinces.

I am particularly honoured to receive you at one of South Africa's inspirational regions, Kwa-Ndebele, where apartheid's ethnicity policy of Bantustans was brought to a halt, rendered unworkable and defeated.

Taking Parliament to the People

We wish to commend you on this excellent and important initiative of 'Taking Parliament to the People'. We are again reminded of the words of our recently departed stalwart and immediate past Chairperson of the NCOP, comrade Joyce Kgoali, when she said (and I quote)

"Taking Parliament to the people has been conceived within a context of the need to engage with and bring on board the ordinary South Africans, as we go about doing our Parliamentary business". (end quote)

She further added (and I quote)

"This programme should serve as a vehicle to place Parliament where people are, ensuring visibility of this important institution even to the most rural parts of our country. Ordinary South Africans, including women, youth, senior citizens, school children, traditional leaders are able to interact with and inform Parliament of their daily experiences". (end quote)

We believe that through this kind of interaction with the people we can gain a clearer understanding of our possibilities and constraints with regard to the processes of pushing back the frontiers of poverty and under-development.

At the same time, such initiatives nurture our young democracy by providing us the opportunity to reach those people who would otherwise not be able to participate in law making and oversight processes of our country.

'Taking Parliament to the People' is indeed an innovative programme that builds on the consultative tradition of Freedom Charter, adopted by the historic Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955. This initiative offers our people in the different provinces a platform for articulating their needs and aspirations.

We believe that this initiative will also contribute greatly to raising the profile of the NCOP within our communities.

As the Deputy President reminded us last year, the NCOP is the custodian of intergovernmental relations and cooperative governance in our country.

An effective NCOP that fulfills its mandate and reflects the interests and wishes of our people will be a huge asset in our own efforts to achieve people centred development here in Mpumalanga.

The setting

Honourable Chairperson, in the next few days our duties will once again bring us face to face with the gross neglect and deprivation caused by years of deliberate discrimination by some towards other human beings.

Among the issues we will be confronted with, are poverty, job creation, rural development, challenges faced by children, women and people with disabilities.

But then we will also hear heroic stories of resilience and resistance to all these hardships by ordinary folks, our many unsung heroes and heroines in our marginal communities of South Africa.

Kwa-Ndebele, the area where most of our work will take place this week, is a microcosm of our country's marginal and economically distressed regions where the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment are most pronounced.

Joblessness, grinding poverty that includes low levels of income, lack of access to basic services, shelter, education, health and security, are amongst the burning issues that confront our people on a daily basis.

These are the people you will interact with as you go about your business this week. These are the people who look upon the democratic state they have put in place to make freedom complete. As their public representatives they expect you to ensure that their voices are heard. From a past of poverty, disease, ignorance, hopelessness, and under-development, they look to the democratic state to make an improvement in the quality of their lives.

Cooperative governance and a better life for all

Despite the objective conditions that we all know to exist and the many challenges of governance and practical implementation that we have faced, particularly in our rural areas, we believe that the people will also attest to their confidence in this government and its ability to improve their well-being.

There is no denying that in the last decade we had many good successes in pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

More people now have access to decent housing, portable water, basic sanitation, electricity, health-care and various social services. Undoubtedly, we will use these achievements as a launching pad to work harder so that we can achieve even better results in the near future.

Transforming a society built on centuries of racial segregation and apartheid and the associated unevenness in levels of income and development was never going to be easy.

Nevertheless, we have been able to lay the foundation for success during the past ten years by putting in place a Constitution that not only makes it impossible for crimes against humanity to be committed, but also provides a legal obligation to advance development. This is the framework that ensures that our new system of government remains democratic, accountable and capable of extending services to all.

Therefore, central to our achievements over the past ten years has been the development of more appropriate structures of governance that are not only accessible and transparent but are also concerned about being effective and efficient.

Much to the dismay of many of the latter day doubting Thomases, the establishment of the three distinctive, interdependent and interrelated spheres of government, has not been a wasteful or inefficient exercise. Rather it has brought government closer to the people and allowed for the execution of nationally established policies and strategies in a manner that takes into account local and regional conditions and experiences.

It is true that that our system of cooperative governance has faced many challenges that have received widespread media attention such as good governance and financial management, tensions around policy coordination particularly with respect to concurrent functions, and limitations in the ability to deliver services despite the availability of adequate financial resources.

However, many of these challenges were to be expected given the enormity of the task at hand. Actually, as we would tend to argue, these problems are less glaring when we consider that at the dawn of our new democracy,

our government had inherited a nightmare of racially based, inefficient, disorganized, and exclusive systems of governance across our country.

Nevertheless, this inherited legacy does not mean that we should be complacent in the face of the various challenges. Rather we need to step up our efforts in strengthening our system of cooperative government in order to make a bigger impact in reducing poverty and underdevelopment. Chapter 3 of our Constitution is very explicit on how this can be done by the different spheres of government through:

Fostering friendly relations
Assisting and supporting one another
Informing one another of, and consulting one another on, matters of common interest
Coordinating actions and legislation with one another
Adhering to agreed procedures; and
Avoiding legal proceedings against one another

The NCOP, as the public representative of our people, can play an important role in ensuring that all spheres of government do not just pay lip service to these constitutional imperatives.

Through its law making and oversight functions the NCOP is best positioned to support the realization of co-operative governance in a manner that advances government's commitment to service delivery and the attainment of vision 2014, of halving levels of poverty and unemployment by the conclusion of our second decade of freedom.

The NCOP, as the custodian of intergovernmental relations and cooperative governance in our country, is best positioned to regularly assess how well we are doing in the face of these challenges we have stated.

It is this august body that can ensure that intergovernmental relations are not appreciated as an end in themselves but rather as a tool for marshalling the creative energies of each sphere to addressing the problems facing our people.

Accordingly, the NCOP is also the most relevant forum to consider the likely impacts of government's efforts to improve co-operative governance including the recent introduction of the Intergovernmental Relations Bill, and the launch of joint projects that involve all the spheres of government, such as the groundbreaking Project Consolidate aimed at supporting and working with local government.

Mpumalanga's experience and the emerging fiscal relations framework

Honourable Chairperson, over the next few days we will come face to face with the realities and perceptions of the Mpumalanga provincial government's ability to deliver a better life to the people of the province, in line with the mandate given to it at the polls.

We are happy to report that considerable progress is being made across the array of interventions that have been proposed including capacitating our municipalities for effective service delivery, laying a foundation for meaningful socio-economic development, and reaching out to targeted vulnerable groups including the youth, women, children and people with disabilities.

As a rural province we face continuous challenges that are a direct legacy of apartheid, which fostered the economic marginalization of our communities and ensured that the majority of our people lived in rural backwaters and homelands, with no access to opportunities for adequate education or an infrastructure suitable for sustainable human development.

We warmly embrace the system of cooperative governance that is in place because of the many opportunities that it presents. At the same time we are supportive of the manner in which our country handles the provincial allocation of budgetary resources.

There are those who are of the view that our intergovernmental fiscal relations system somehow limits the ability of provinces to set their own priorities or to become elements of a developmental state by turning them into 'agencies' of the national sphere of government.

At this stage we are happy with the intergovernmental fiscal relations system that is emerging in our country and we would wish to caution about a movement towards a new dispensation for allocating resources for provinces in a manner that would unfairly entrench and magnify the spatial disparities of the past.

The NCOP, we believe, has a critical role to play in ensuring that the resolution of the debate on the role of provinces and the devolution of fiscal responsibilities does not result in a mountain of disadvantage for that group of our citizens that reside in our less well off provinces.

The challenge of implementation

Honourable Chairperson, as we begin the journey of the second decade of freedom we are faced with the challenge of translating into concrete programmes many of the ambitious policies that we have adopted for improving the lives of our people.

However, as honourable members would be likely to agree, this phase of our work is fraught with many difficulties, particularly for those of us at the provincial and local sphere of government.

While we achieved a lot in pushing back the frontiers of poverty, we have, as three distinct but inter-related spheres of government also experienced many weakness and failures. For instance in the process of implementing policy we have often found that in some cases the policy is simply too complex for the capacity of the provincial or local officials who are expected to implement it. At times we found that the policy was simply beyond the financial resources that a typical provincial or local department can reasonably mobilize, given the financial constraints that confront provinces or municipalities.

One of the imperatives of a strong developmental state is the existence of a capable, well-resourced and flexible cadre of public servants. The current institutional and legislative framework of government makes it difficult to deploy and direct public sector human resource capacity to where it is required and where there are implementation bottlenecks.

That is why it is important to create a developmental public service and public administration, a public service that attracts and retains the best that our society has to offer.

We must also enhance and create leadership at national, provincial, and local levels to take us where we want to be and match the capacity of the leadership to the tasks and the challenges that are confronting us.

Concluding remarks

Because of time constraints we cannot go into all the challenges we face related to corporative governance and issues of poverty, rural development and health, but we hope that as we come to the end of our programme this Friday, we shall have done enough to give our people hope for a better future.

As we celebrate a decade of freedom and commence our journey through another 10 years of change, we can declare that we have indeed gone a long way in ushering in that democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa espoused in the Freedom Charter

Today we can look back at the advances we have made and declare proudly that we are a participatory democracy.

A democracy that draws its vibrancy from the involvement of the masses of the people who are indeed beginning to act as their own liberators.

I thank you.