

## **ADDRESS OF THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA, THABANG MAKWETLA, AT THE FIRST SITTING OF THE THIRD DEMOCRATIC MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL HOUSE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS**

**Nelspruit 08 July 2005**

Honourable Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi Ubaba Umthethwa, Nyambose;

The Royalty of the Province of Mpumalanga;

Esteemed members of the House of Traditional Leaders;

Bayetel Zingonyama naMakhosi aseMpumalanga,

It is an honour and a privilege for us to stand before you today in what constitute an important event in the political calendar of our province, the sessional opening of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders. This we do with an immense sense of responsibility, cognisant of the special place and role traditional leaders occupy in our new democratic system of governance.

I wish to thank most sincerely the members of the previous House for their contribution in advancing the desires of our people for a better life.

Allow me, once again, chairperson, on behalf of the citizens of this province, to congratulate the new leadership of the Mpumalanga House of Traditional Leaders and the new chairperson, Inkosi Ubaba uMthethwa. It is also heartening that this House displayed leadership and wisdom by electing a woman-member to serve as its deputy chairperson.

**Nyambose, sinesiqiniseko sokuthi wena nethimba lakho niyoyibamba ishisa, ukuze kuvezeke izidingo nenhloso zomphakathi wa kithi la eMpumalanga.**

*“ Where there is no vision, the people perish ,”* so said the wise king of Israel, King Solomon (Proverbs 29:18)

It is vision that produced the great Egyptian civilisation over four thousands years ago and gave rise to the towering pyramids that still amaze us today. Vision inspired the Greeks to produce philosophy and art that still impact the thinking of our world. Vision motivated the great Roman Empire to expand its influence and colonise the known world. Vision inspired the explorers who circumvented the globe and ignited the creation and expansion of many of the nations that we know today. Vision transformed the agricultural world into the industrial age. Vision gave birth to the thousands of inventions in the last two centuries that have transformed our lives, argues Dr Myles Munroe.

Whereas the role of visionaries cannot solely explain the development of human society over the ages, as Myles Munroe argues, their contribution in articulating and directing these processes cannot be denied.

Chairperson, honourable Members, the convening of the House of Traditional Leaders today, comes in the wake of the sad news of the untimely death of the King of AmaNdebele wakwa Ndzundza, King Mayisha III a week ago. The Government and people of Mpumalanga are still in a state of shock and disbelief. Our heartfelt condolences go to the Ndzundza Royal family and the Ndzundza nation at large. In King Mayisha III, this House lost one of its pillars; the Government lost a leader, a patriot and a reliable partner in the quest to build a better life for our people and our country.

May his spirit and his reputation continue to inspire us as we grapple with the many needs of our communities.

It is peculiarly fitting for us to recognise the hand of God in this terrible visitation, to bow in humble submission to His chastisements, and to ask from the gods blessings upon our country, our province and our people. (With all humility may we please rise and observe a moment of silence).

Chairperson, today's opening takes place as we commence the second decade of democracy with a growing sense of maturity within our administrative and governance structures. We are now able to say what it is that works to advance our struggle, to push back the frontiers of poverty and create a better life for all our people.

Indeed we gather here today excited that at last we are well on our way to reach consensus on the role this indigenous institution of our people can play in local, provincial and national politics. The proclamation of Traditional Leadership and Governance Act, Act No: 41 of 2003, has clearly propelled us forward and our traditional leaders can now perform their unique and vital roles within our broad administrative framework.

Let me congratulate those of our traditional leaders in our province who continue to actively participate in the governance of their municipal areas, either as elected public representatives or as leaders of traditional councils. We see so many opportunities for close co-operation between elected local structures and the institution of traditional leadership in our Province. These opportunities can be multiplied if traditional leaders can continue to support and participate in these municipalities in their ex-officio capacities.

Chairperson, as government we are committed to continue forging closer developmental relations with traditional leaders, in order to ensure that the people in traditional communities also have the possibility to participate in the processes of socio-economic development to which we are all committed.

We are all agreed that government, at all levels, is there to serve the needs and aspirations of our people.

We are sure that you are quite aware of the high premium that this government places on the institution of traditional leadership and the high regard that we have for your contribution to society. We do so because of our conviction that as traditional leaders you have a critical role to play in our integrated rural development programme. We knew then - as we know now – that government alone will not be able to face the monumental challenges imposed on us by our popular mission.

All of us - yourselves as leaders by political tradition and us as elected representatives - should regard ourselves as “servants” charged with looking after the welfare and best interests of the people who have placed their trust in us.

You all know that traditional authority is a tried and tested system of governance that existed long before the advent of colonialism. The African National Congress was the first amongst political parties in our country to address the question of traditional leadership. Its first constitution adopted in 1909, provided for a forum within Congress known as the Upper House of Chiefs.

This attitude of the ANC created a framework, which allowed traditional leaders to look at local problems and address them from the point of view of the national agenda, which sought to advance the interests of the African majority against the oppressor.

It is this attitude towards the institution of traditional leadership which explains the reason why many of the leaders of the African National Congress were themselves highly respected traditional leaders. They understood that the practices of customary law and tradition could only flourish under conditions of freedom and democracy. During this period many traditional leaders, like those who came before them, fiercely resisted every attempt by colonialists to take over their land and subject their people to discriminatory policies.

Chairperson, as we enter the second decade of freedom we can proudly say that indeed we have gone a long way in ensuring that we work towards that better life. In the past decade we have brought water and electricity to many households.

We have built houses to accommodate our people. We have opened access to quality health care and education and we have tackled the demon of racism.

But we have also ensured the continued existence of our institutions of traditional leadership and that these institutions play a prominent role in the democratic governance of our province and country. Over the past years a number of ground-breaking legislation has been passed with regard to this august institution. These include national and provincial Bills and the establishment of the Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims.

### **The Commission**

The establishment of the Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims opens yet another window of opportunity for the institution of Traditional Leadership to continue with its journey of refinement.

The issue of disputes has occupied many royal families for a considerable period of time. We need not remind this House about the background to this problem. You are well aware of the way in which successive apartheid administrations played loose and fast with the institution of traditional leadership, how differences and disputes were manipulated to suit their short-sighted agendas and how opponents of the homeland system were sidelined or eliminated in favour of more compliant candidates.

As government we believe it is now time to bring certainty to a number of lingering issues and restore the dignity of traditional leadership in our society.

You will have noticed that the commission is comprised of eminent persons from various specialised fields, including some from our own province. We are therefore looking forward to thorough and intensive investigative work and lasting solutions on all disputes pertaining to traditional leadership.

We would want to break away from a trend which has seen traditional leadership disputes being subjected to courts, which, as we all know, with due respect, do not have adequate knowledge of the African customary law governing traditional leadership.

We would, therefore, urge you to give your fullest co-operation to the commission and provide it with the necessary information, documentation and the benefits of your experience.

The Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims is a nationally driven commission. It was established in terms of the provision of the Traditional leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, and as a result of succession disputes as well as claims of traditional leadership. Whilst operating nationally, it has authority to decide on any traditional leadership dispute and claim arising in any province.

The commission has authority to investigate disputes as they arise, either on request or of its own accord. However, the commission kicks in after attempts by the House of Traditional Leaders have failed to amicably resolve the matter. The House of Traditional Leaders therefore plays a significant role in the referral of disputes and claims to the commission. In doing that, the House shall be fulfilling its legal mandate.

Members of the House as well as Traditional Leaders in the province are urged to support the commission. This will then enable it to restore the dignity that was traditionally bestowed on these customary institutions, which were a source of wisdom for African society.

**The provincial Traditional Leadership and Governance Bill 2005** is currently at an advanced stage. It is envisaged that it might be tabled before the legislature before the end of September 2005. It is in line with the provisions of the national Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2004, which provide for standardisation of all provincial legislation.

Once more, both the national Framework Act as well as the provincial Bill demonstrates the government's intention of ensuring that Traditional Leaders and Houses of Traditional Leaders are accommodated within the new dispensation. They both clearly spell our powers, duties and functions that may be performed by traditional Councils as well as by the Local Houses of Traditional Leaders.

This is a noble approach towards the pursuit of the principle of the "peoples' contract" the government committed itself to.

This, however, does not suggest that there will not be challenges to be confronted by traditional Leaders as well as by government in the operationalisation of this legislation. Should challenges occur, both government and Traditional Leaders should resort to the old traditional mechanism of consultations and discussions with a view of finding a common ground, and also in the interest of people residing in areas of traditional rule.

### **Local Houses of Traditional Leaders**

The drafting of the Bill on Local Houses is at an advanced stage. It is also, within the purview of the national Traditional Leadership Framework Act of 2003, which provides for the establishment of District Houses at each District level of our province. Of importance is that the Bill begins to clarify not only roles that are to be played by the District Houses, it also highlights developmental relations and roles between District Houses and District Municipalities.

As government, it is our view that developmental relationships between Local and District Houses on the one hand, and local municipalities on the other, should be positive and development related. There should exist a developmental approach that embraces an integrative mindset.

This can only exist when traditional leaders and elected councillors are working closer with each other. This is the only way we can jointly push back the frontiers of poverty, particularly in rural areas. Your Majesties, we owe this to our country.

### **Initiation**

Chairperson, the other challenge that faces this House is that of Traditional Initiation and Circumcision schools. We laud your initiatives in kick-starting the drafting of the Ingoma/koma/ initiation Bill. This Bill intends to regulate the cultural practices of the people of the Province of Mpumalanga.

AmaKhosi are urged to participate in the process of the drafting of the Bill, the framework of which was worked out and agreed at the provincial conference of the House of Traditional leaders. The bill will go a long way in dealing with the challenges we have been encountering related to this practice. Once again, let us remind you that we shall constantly bank on your cooperation and support in ensuring that these schools continue to maintain their customary significance and integrity.

Chairperson, eleven years into our democracy, South Africa has a caring government, with housing programmes for the poor; with social security grants for pensioners, young children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. We have programmes to redistribute land.

Today, South Africa is a country with a justice system that serves the people, guided by the Constitution and laws that are intended to prevent abuse. Today, South Africa is a partner among countries of Africa, working together to bring peace and development to our continent. With other countries and peoples of the world, we pursue peace, development and international relations that benefit all.

Chairperson, as Government we have always contended that the bulk of responsibility for the delivery of services must reside at the level of local government. It is this sphere of government, which is the closest to our communities on the ground and, thus has the duty to deliver such services that directly affect the citizenry in their daily lives.

Water, electricity, roads, sanitation and refuse removal are services that can make an immediate and positive impact on the lives of our people. This is why local government is so important and all of us have a duty to support the relevant structures in performing their functions.

The bulk of responsibility for the delivery of services must reside at the level of Local government because it is this sphere of government, which is closest to our communities.

### **Ward committees**

Chairperson, we are happy that the majority of our municipalities have succeeded in establishing Ward Committees. There is a need for us to strengthen these structures in order to bridge the gap between government planning and implementation on the one hand, and community involvement on the other hand.

The Department of Provincial and Local Government is planning a National Conference on Ward Committees this year. It is hoped that the conference will generate ideas that will further help Ward Committees enhance their functional capabilities.

Chairperson, the forthcoming Local Government elections offer us yet another opportunity and platform to renew and consolidate governance at local level. It is through these elections that our people would once more express their choice for Local Government leadership. Like we have done in the past, let us go out and mobilise our subjects to actively take part in these elections.

### **Partnerships**

Chairperson, the daunting task of providing free basic services can only be completed through partnerships and cooperation with all stakeholders, including Traditional Leaders. We believe these partnerships will immensely

contribute towards improving the credibility and integrity of our planning processes, i.e. Integrated Development Plans and Local Economic Development Projects.

### **Project Consolidate**

We also trust that Project Consolidate will assist us in making our Municipalities equal to the task of service delivery imperatives, particularly in the area of project planning and implementation, financial management and revenue generation.

It is important that we all become agents of change and adopt the principled position that we shall serve the people. In our discussions we must frankly and honestly talk about the enormous progress we have achieved over the last 11 years. But we must also acknowledge that we will still have to do a great deal of work before we succeed to eradicate poverty, unemployment, homelessness, disease, ignorance, crime and under-development in our communities.

Chairperson, these are some of the challenges we have to tackle head-on. We know that Inkosi u-Mzingeli Mthethwa and his team, will rise to our expectations. If we approach our work within the framework of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, we will be able to play a part in improving the living standards of our rural communities.

On behalf of the government and people of Mpumalanga I wish you a fruitful and fulfilling session and declare the Mpumalanga House of Traditional Leaders open.

**I thank you.**