



**Keynote Address by the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor, Cllr. Mahole Simon Mofokeng on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nangalembe Night Vigil Massacre held at the Zone 7 Stadium, Sebokeng, Sedibeng on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

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Programme Director,

Speaker of Sedibeng District Council: Cllr. Kedibone Mogotsi;

Members of Mayoral Committee;

Fellow Councillors;

Chairperson of Khulumani Support Group;

Officials of Sedibeng District Municipality here present;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Distinguished Guests;

Today we take the time to mark another milestone in the rich history of the many sacrifices made by the communities of Sedibeng in ushering in our hard earned democracy. It is through the efforts and sacrifices of the entire nation that we have attained our freedom, and the community of Sedibeng was not to be left behind in this quest.

Through various campaigns and protracted engagements with the then system that separated brother from brother based on the colour of their skin, a system that was premised on the fact that some people are genetically inferior to others and as a result the continued oppression and exploitation of the said inferior group was justified.

The community of Sedibeng, filled with the quest to rid themselves of this stigma and the rampant exploitation and exclusion from the decisions which impacted on their lives and the lives of the future generation, stood firm to challenge the status quo from time to time.

It was no surprise therefore that this beautiful District was declared the “Cradle of Human Rights Struggles’ by the first President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The fact that the Anglo-Boer Covenant was signed on the river bank just a stone’s throw from here was to set the tone for the resistance which was to characterize the communities of Sedibeng.

## **The Historical Climate**

In 1991, as the entire nation was still in a joyous mood about the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, with the communities organizing themselves and joining the Glorious Movement-the ANC in their thousands daily. The exiled compatriots were preparing to come back into

the country they have last seen in their youth. The government of the day could not stand by and watch.

It was at this stage when the rampant criminality by the youth had begun to grip the Vaal in general and Zone 7 Sebokeng in particular. It was not uncommon to find criminal gangs operating with impunity while the police were concerned with how many activists they were going to kill. The criminal element was a major sideshow to the business of liberation.

It was at the height of this criminality that the activists of the time coined the notion of “Comrade Tsotsi” here in Sedibeng. This was in response to the adjunct provocateurs-**Bo Phepeletsane hloba se Nkotong** who paraded themselves as concerned community members but preyed on the vulnerable communities.

Chris Nangalembe rose out of this furnace, through a baptism of fire, survived the criminality which was gripping Zone 7 in particular and Sebokeng in general to challenge the hold that the criminals had on the his community. He traversed the length and breadth of Sedibeng raising the awareness of the youth to the urgent business of freedom while never failing to deal harshly with the rampant criminal acts which were taking root in our communities.

The youth and the community warmed up to him. Structures of the youth and committees were formed in his wake. The criminal elements were fast losing grip and had nowhere to hide. It is for this reason that he was murdered.

It was while Chris Nangalembe was doing this sterling work that another facet of the struggle was unfolding. On the labour front, Numsa was at the time the COSATU affiliate with the highest membership. It was engaged with the Metal Industries in a protracted strike. The members of Numsa were locked out of their workplace while the courts were deliberately delaying the outcome of the legitimate demands of the workers.

In this environment, young Zulu speaking men were bussed into hostels around Sedibeng and Sebokeng in particular to ensure continued production in the then Yskor. Kwamadala and Kwa-Masiza hostels were flooded with these men. They were to become the foundation of what was later to become Uwusa, a reactionary union.

As the Numsa strike came to an end, with the workers having dealt the employer a very emphatic defeat, the men at Kwamadala hostel were about to lose their jobs as well as their accommodation. The stage was then set for a disaster in the making.

It is common cause that the Gauteng Chairman of the IFP was found to have been transporting weapons into these hostel. These men in Kwa-Madala hostel were spoiling for a fight.

### **The Cowardly Attacks**

It was on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2001, at the night vigil of Chris Nangalembe, which was attended by hundreds of mourners who came to pay their respects, celebrating a life of their leader in freedom songs and salutary slogans that the stage was set for what was to herald sporadic attacks of communities throughout Gauteng province.

It was during this wake, in a tent which was overflowing with community members, preparing to send their hero to his resting place that a hand grenade was thrown. This was followed by sporadic outbursts of machine gun fire into the stunned multitudes. Thirty nine people were killed on the spot and forty more were injured.

This attack was to become the method of attacks on our communities in the months that followed. The attackers made bold by this dastardly act which they carried out with impunity, was to become their calling card as they terrorized communities in the trains. These forms of attacks were later to be transferred to Thokoza in Ekurhuleni.

It was not long thereafter, a year to be exact that we saw the attack on what is today known as the Boipatong Massacre in June the following year. In the period leading to the Boipatong Massacre, at the height of the train attacks and the concentrated attacks in Thokoza, Sedibeng was placed under numerous threats of “Inkatha is coming”.

Threat after threat of the impending Impi attacks on the communities of the Vaal created untold panic. Workers would leave their workplaces early, students and learners would stampede out of schools. Communities would be seen packing and leaving the area in their thousands.

The youth on the other hand would be found manufacturing petrol bombs and whatever makeshift weapon they could muster. All of this happened with the conspicuous absence of the police.

The communities of Sedibeng, like those in Thokoza and the train commuters in Soweto were under siege. It has come to pass that the attack on Gobizithwana in Zone 14 happened during this period. The calls and threats of “Inkatha is coming” were to find expression and fulfillment in the chilling attacks on the night of the long knives in Boipatong.

## **The Night Vigil Massacre Effect**

As it is common with all the challenges which the community of Sedibeng had to face, the communities of Sedibeng rallied behind the cause of freedom. Street committees and block committees were formed. The civic movement was strengthened.

Criminal elements were dealt a crippling blow. Community cohesion was enhanced. Peace prevailed within the taxi industry. It is not a coincidence that the Vaal has had very little if any taxi industry feuds. For all this we have the blood of our heroes and heroines who fell on that fateful night.

This massacre, together with the Boipatong massacre and the Sharpeville shooting, not least the September 03<sup>rd</sup> Vaal Uprising as well as the Delmas Treason trial and the Sharpeville Six, served to usher in our democracy. The honour of being “The Cradle of Human Rights Struggles of South Africa” is well deserved.

## **The Legacy**

It is with all these heroic acts of our communities that a fitting tribute to our forebears is demanded. Apart from watering the tree of freedom, accelerating the transition into democracy, ridding South Africa of oppression, what more can be said of these sacrifices?

As a fitting tribute to the fallen heroes and heroines of Sedibeng, the Constitutional Square of our country is here in Sedibeng, our glorious Constitution which is the best in the world was signed here in Sedibeng.

We are today enjoying the fruits of one of the best democracies in the whole African Continent. We have gone from one election to another with relative ease and peace. Housing has been provided to our communities on a grand scale.

Sedibeng, which still boasts the highest number of RDP houses built throughout the entire country continues to improve the lives of our people.

In recognition of the heroic struggles of the community of Sedibeng and the fallen heroes and heroines of Sedibeng, we developed various themes to guide us going forward. The three themes over the past two years guiding us are:

- Our history, Our Legacy, Lest we forget.
- Together with our Communities, a final push to reclaim our Heritage.
- Together with our communities- A final push to speedy service delivery

In pursuit of these themes and in line with our generational Sedibeng Growth and Development Strategy, we developed a 100 Days Service

Delivery Programme which was announced last year on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre. The central thrust of the programme was to develop all the historical precincts around the entire Sedibeng District as well as to change the face of our Region for the better.

It is through this programme that we have been able to do the following:

- The Sharpeville Cemetery which is the last home of the fallen heroes and heroines of the Sharpeville Massacre has been transformed to reflect the stature of our forebears with a view to capture their heroic deeds.
- The Vuka Cemetery which hosts the remains of the Boipatong Massacre heroes and heroines has been transformed with the tombstones of victims forming the highlight to mark the extreme sacrifices of our communities.
- We have just handed over the gravestones of the victims of the Zone 7 Nangalembe Night Virgil Massacre to the families of our fallen heroes and heroines this morning. All these sites constitute our piece of Heroes Acre here in Sedibeng, no other District boasts such a rich heritage.

- The Constitutional Walk in Sharpeville is undergoing a serious transformation.
- The Sharpeville Hall is receiving its fair share of attention as part of the Constitution Precinct.
- The Sharpeville Police Station, from where the first salvo of bullets was fired in 1960 has been transformed into a Craft Hub for reconciliation and peace purposes.
- Boipatong has been transformed from a dusty patch and a dark city through the construction of paved sidewalks and tarred streets. The street lighting in the area makes it a very safe haven to raise our children and the community to live in peace.
- The streets of Evaton, the centurion and oldest township in Sedibeng, are undergoing a transformation as a result of tarring and paving of street walks.
- Sharpeville is enjoying continued tarring and paving of sidewalks year in and year out.
- Streets in Sebokeng Zone 13, 11, 03 and Zone 7 here have undergone massive transformation due to tarred roads and paving. The recent rains did not transform themselves into rivers and floods as a result. I will be handing over the seven streets that have been tarred to the community of Zone 7.
- The CCTV cameras which are installed at all the strategic spots throughout the District have resulted into a marked reduction in crime.

- The completion of the Mafatsane Multi-Purpose Hub, a walking distance from here, just across the stream, will provide a one stop shop for government services.
- The Evaton Fire Station will be opened soon to provide much needed services to our communities. This is the first of its kind in a township.

In total, we have tarred and paved not less than 39 streets throughout the District and together with our communities we will do more.

It is in carrying out these projects that we have been able to provide contracts and sub-contracts to emerging Businessmen and women. Some of these projects are headed by people living with disabilities. A lot of much needed jobs have been created. We are continuing to train entrepreneurs to take the development of our Region forward.

### **The 2010 FIFA World Cup**

As part of the 2010 FIFA World Cup strategy, Sedibeng District Municipality, in spite of not being a host city, had the enviable position of hosting two teams which participated in the World Cup. We hosted both Switzerland, the only team to beat the current holders Spain during the qualifying rounds as well as Didier Drogba led Ivory Coast. We provided world class training and camping facilities in George Thabe Stadium and the Isak Steyl Stadium.

The FIFA family and Local Organizing Committee were pleasantly surprised.

As part of the World Cup Legacy projects, our youth and coaches were provided with world class training camp from PSV Eindhoven. Our Public Viewing Areas have become centers of community recreation and leisure beyond the World Cup.

It is also as a result of the good financial management of the Sedibeng District Municipality, which saw us receiving five consecutive clean audits that we see the private sector investing heavily in the District.

It is as a result of the good work here in Sedibeng that we continue to see shopping malls mushrooming annually in our District, with existing malls undergoing substantial extensions. This has resulted in the creation of much needed jobs during construction and beyond.

Heineken bucked the trend by putting up a multi-million trend by building a brewing plant, creating long term jobs to the surrounding communities. This was followed by Coca-cola Water bottling plant in the Region.

Fast on the heels of these investments, the wholesale giant, Makro followed suit to create much needed jobs during and after construction.

## **Matric Pass Rate**

In the manner, standards and custom established and set by the heroes and heroines of the Nangalembe Night Virgil Massacre, the learners of Sedibeng were not to be outdone.

It is not a coincidence therefore that our learners have outstripped the National and the Provincial Matriculation Pass averages yet again.

With the national matric pass average standing at 67.8% and the provincial average standing at 77.8%, our regional average stand at whooping 82%. This is 12% more than the 2014 targeted average. I wish them well in their future career path. Sedibeng is indeed a District of heroes and winners.

I take this opportunity to wish all the learners and educators well on the opening of schools throughout the country today. I have no doubt that the Class of 2011 will continue with the trend of returning excellent results in Matriculation this year. This is borne by the fact that we do not have the 2010 FIFA World Cup as an added distraction.

## **Statue for the fallen heroes**

It is in the light of the deeds of the community of Zone 7 and as a fitting tribute to their sacrifice, that the Sedibeng District Municipality is looking at ways and means to see to the erection and setting up of a Statue to mark the Nangalembe Night Virgil Massacre.

This we will do in consultation with the communities here as well as the families of the fallen victims. It is in this manner that we have been able to achieve so much. We have in the past year undertaken successful trips with the survivors and victims of the various massacres to Cape Town and Lesotho. The Cape Town trip coincided with the opening of Parliament, while we were warmly hosted by the Basotho Nation in Maseru.

**In conclusion**, it is the manner in which the nation treats its heroes that it is measured. There is no question about it that we in Sedibeng owe our rich historical heritage to the sacrifices made by the people here in Zone 7 in particular and Sedibeng in general. It is only fitting that we express our gratitude for the valiant acts. Sedibeng cares and they belong.

It is as we prepare ourselves for the 2011 Local Government Elections, four days after the 99<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ANC, guided by the clarion call by the President Jacob Zuma who said in Polokwane over the weekend,

“When we celebrate our centenary in Mangaung next year, we will be celebrating the triumph of a people united in struggle, when the masses of our people united with progressive forces across the world, to fight against an oppressive regime. As South Africans, Africans and humanity at large we celebrate this tremendous example of human solidarity”.

The President further continued by saying, “On this 99th anniversary of the ANC, we are proud to state boldly that whilst others may change their allegiances and their mission with the shifting sands of illusion, the ANC remains consistent. We adapt to and move with the times, but our mission remains the creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society”.

Sedibeng in recognition of the role played by the community of Sedibeng, will not be found wanting. I am looking forward to your voting in great numbers to ensure victory to our glorious movement, the ANC.

I Thank You.