



Keynote Address by the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor, Cllr. Mahole Simon Mofokeng on the occasion of the Memorial Lecture for the 27th Anniversary of the Vaal Uprisings held on the 01st September 2011, at the Sebokeng College of Education in Sedibeng

Programme Director: Madam Speaker: Cllr Busi Modisakeng
Executive Mayor: Emfuleni Local Municipality: Cllr Gretha Hlongwane
Speaker : Emfuleni Local Municipality: Cllr Msebenzi Qelosha
Former Deputy Secretary: Vaal Civic Association: Isabella Letlhake
Fellow Councillors;
Distinguished Guests;
Setjhaba sa Sedibeng

In honour of the fallen heroes and heroines of Sedibeng, Bophelong, Sebokeng, Evaton, Boipatong and Sharpeville, the heroes and heroines who brought apartheid South Africa to its knees, I greet you. In honour of the decisive role played by the Vaal Civic Association and the vision brought by our guest speaker, Isabella Letlhake, I bring our respects.

Programme Director, last year we as the Sedibeng District Municipality committed ourselves through the theme: ***Together with our Communities-A final push towards reclaiming our Heritage.*** At the time, I made a commitment that a reputable service provider will be engaged to assist us in recording the rich history of Sedibeng.

I am proud to say that the first installment of the book is at an advanced stage and it makes great reading, and part of my speech will be based in great detail on the said book. I hope that Cde Isabella Letlhake will take the time to bring this first version of the book to life by bringing in the much needed perspective to the narrative.

WE hope that the freedom songs of the time as well as mood in some of the meetings will be covered. The book, which will soon be made available, is proudly titled: ***Asinamali: The Heroic story of the 3rd September 1984.***

The year before last, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the 3rd of September, we as Sedibeng District Municipality, committed ourselves to the theme: ***Our heroes-Our Legacy-Lest we forget.***

It is in line with the said two themes that we ave been digging deep into our rich history and heritage to tell the story of the Vaal, Sedibeng as we

have come to call it today, to show and indeed proclaim for the entire country and the world: ***Sedibeng is the Region of the brave.***

As part of this broad commitment to the history and heritage of Sedibeng, a few days ago I had the honour of laying a wreath on the grave of one of the great woman leaders of Sedibeng, Cde Elisabeth Letanta.

She was part of the mobilizing for the 3rd September Rally in 1984, also responsible for carrying the official ANC emblem into the country after being deployed by the President of the ANC at the time in 1985, Oliver Reginald Tambo.

This year, as a continuation of that commitment, the theme is properly coined: ***Reclaiming our Heritage to consolidate governance in the Greater Vaal***” What does this year theme tell us? What more needs to be done? How well can we do it?

Perhaps I need to go into the impact of our rich heritage here in Sedibeng. In 1902, on the 31st May a Peace Treaty was signed in Pretoria to signal the end of the Anglo-Boer War. The Peace Talks were held here in Vereeniging, which culminated in the signing in Pretoria.

Eight years later, the Union of South Africa was formed, which proposed a Bill which ensured that the African majority are stripped of their right to

land in the Land Act of 1913. The Africans, in opposition to the Land Act, grouped together to form what is today the Glorious Movement in 1912, the African Nation Congress, at the time known as the SANNC.

In 1943, the first occupants of Sharpeville took to their houses in Vuka. In 1959, the last black residents of Top Location were forcibly removed to Sharpeville. A year later, on the 21st March 1960, during the Anti-Pass March, 69 people were killed and 180 wounded in Sharpeville. This brought about the Sharpeville Massacre.

The effect of this massacre, which brought to an end the peaceful writing of petitions by the ANC, saw the glorious movement going underground and resorting to the armed struggle after the banning together with PAC.

The whole world is shocked by the atrocity of the apartheid regime and wakes up to the need for human rights for the people of South Africa. Sebokeng is established as a township in 1967.

After the 1976 student uprising of Soweto, a period of quiet becomes the order of the day. Repression of dissenting voices is at its highest. The government of the day bans organizations and newspapers on the 19th September 1977. The voices of the voiceless are silenced.

In 1983, after a protracted opposition to the Koornhof Bills and the hated Local Councils elections, the Lekoa Town Council goes out to increase the rental by R 5.90 to R 45.00, a very high sum of money at the time. In 1983 October, the VCA was launched at the St Francis Roman Church in Small Farms, Evaton.

Through the concerted efforts of the VCA, the political lull which was common throughout the length of the country was broken. On the 3rd September 1984 the sleeping giant awoke. The fire for freedom burned high and bright.

The attempt by the then government to send 7000 troops into the Sharpeville through the Operation Palmiet, only served to show the angry majority in the country that no amount of weapons will prosper against the will of the people. The communities of Sedibeng went on to defy the intended suppression.

It was this open defiance in the face of the show of force which galvanized the entire country. Thokoza followed suit, with Atteridgeville and New Brighton following. In no time, the entire country was rendered ungovernable.

Let us look at the timeline for a minute. Evaton in 1955 led the Azikhwelwa Bus Strikes. It was followed by Alexandra in 1957. Our

communities are beginning to mobilize. Is it not a coincidence that the Azikhwelwa Bus Strikes share the same birth-date with the adoption of the Freedom Charter?

The Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, happens a few months after the forced removals of the community in Top Location. The Sharpeville Massacre helped to raise the world awareness on the barbaric apartheid system.

The resolve of the community of Sharpeville showed that the African majority was ready to lay their lives for freedom. Acting in isolation from all the other townships in the Vaal at the time, one imagines what could have happened if Evaton, Bophelong and Boipatong had joined in 1960.

Our history as we go along will prove what happens when the community of Sedibeng acts as one. Along came 1984, the Vaal Civic Association is establishing branches in all the townships and all the zones. Two months after the UDF is launched in Mitchells Plain in 1983, we see the launch of the VCA in October.

The Vaal Civic Association is hardly a year on the 3rd of September 1984 but its influence runs deep in the mind and lives of the community of Sedibeng. It is this cohesion, with the added energy of the students in COSAS, which ultimately becomes the proverbial straw which breaks the camel's back.

Not even Operation Palmiet can stop the awakening elephant. The entire country is in flames. The various State of Emergencies cannot stop the Tsunami. The black child is fighting for his freedom. The country is ungovernable.

We fast track the time line ten years later, Nelson Mandela has been released and the negotiations are held. The National Party is holding the process ransom with a demand for a Federalist Constitution while the IFP refuses to join the fray. Brinkmanship is the order of the day.

With support from the security forces, IFP hit squads attack the community in Zone 7 in what is today called the Nangalembe Massacre. And if that is not enough, the IFP Impis attacks the community of Boipatong during the night of the long knives.

The ANC decides that enough is enough, they can no longer stand by and watch our communities here in Sedibeng killed indiscriminately. They suspend their participation in the negotiation.

The Nationalist Party then does an about turn, agreeing on the date of the elections and the Constitution which ushers in a Unitary South Africa. We hold our first democratic elections on the 27th April. Nelson Mandela the father of the Nation is the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

The rich history and heritage was not without losses, trials and tribulations. These trials and tribulations gave us our heroes and heroines. We have the Sharpeville Six Trialist. These are our heroes and heroin who spent the longest time on the Death Row.

- Francis Don Mokhesi now deceased, may his Soul rest in Peace
- Oupa Molefi Diniso also deceased, may his soul rest in peace
- Duma Joshua Khumalo now deceased, may his soul rest in peace.
- Mojalefa Regionald Sefatsa
- Reed Malebo Mokoena
- Theresa Ramashemola, the only woman on the deathrow.

These heroes and heroines brought such untold pressure on the apartheid government that they were ultimately released.

It is also interesting to notice the following, trivia or fate: Reed Malebo Mokoena, one of the Sharpeville Six Trialists, was born on Friday 13 December 1962. He is sentenced together with the Sharpeville Six Trialists on Friday 13th December 1985 and guess what? They are released from the Death Row on Friday 13th December 1991. A very strange coincidence if indeed it is, but a date in history nevertheless.

The Delmas treason Trial, a marathon trial which was to hold the imagination of the whole world, brought into sharp focus and under world scrutiny, the will of a people united in their dream for freedom.

Forged together in common destiny, the heroic deeds of the community of Sedibeng was there for all to see.

Special Sedibeng Tributes goes out to the Delmas Treason Trialists, who took the brunt of community resistance to beat the apartheid system at its repressive best to give us Sedibeng very broad shoulders to stand on.

We acknowledge the selfless service to the people of Sedibeng by the following: The nation warmed to them and many more struggles were replicated throughout the country.

These are our heroes:

Lazarus More; Serame Hlanyane; Thabiso Ratsomo; Moss Chikane; Neftale Nkopane; Sam Matlole; Tom Manthata; Jeff Moselane; Patrick Baleka; Petrus Mokoena; Bavumile Vilakazi; Terror Lekota; Qcinimuzi Malindi; Johnny Mokoena; Jerry Thlopane; Simon Vilakazi; Oupa Hlomuka; Popo Molefe; Mkhambi Malindi; Ephraim Ramakhula; Simon Nkoli

When all is said and done, our appreciation and respects to the Vaal Civic Association for taking the lessons learned from the Evaton Azikhwelwa strikes, the Sharpeville Anti-Pass Campaign, the Freedom Charter project, the Soweto Student uprising, to bring us within ten years of our democratic elections.

These are our heroes and heroines:

Micheal Kgaka; Dorcas Raditsela; Cgina Malindi; Thabiso Ratsomo; Chippa Motubatsi; Essau Raditsela; Sekoati Mokoena; Elizabeth Letanta; Isabella Connie Lethlake; Simon Nkoli; Bavumile Vilakazi; Lord McCamel; Simon Vilakazi; Sefako Motloun; Buti Mofokeng; Johnny Motete; Ernest Sotsu; Rev Tebogo Moselane; Serame Hlanyane; Cde Nkopane; Cde Oliphant; Sam Matlole; Jerry Tlhopane; Thabiso Ratsomo

The selfless sacrifices of these heroes and heroines brought us where we are today. It is not a coincidence that the best Constitution was signed here in Sedibeng.

It is through our theme this year when we say: Reclaiming our heritage to consolidate governance in the greater Vaal that we seek to do the following:

- Foster the historical cohesion of the community of Sedibeng which

was evident in 1984, to bring about a Consolidated Governance in Sedibeng during this term of office.

- To reach our dream of a united community under one Metropolitan System of Government in 2025
- To give wings to Vaal 21 River City project for the economic development of all who share the common Vaal River as their border.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to invite you all to attend the Prayer Service to mark the 27th Anniversary of the Vaal Uprising where the pivotal role played by the Church will be told. The service will be held tomorrow at the Mphatlatsane Theatre in Sebokeng at 10h00.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy spring day which comes after a very peaceful Eid Mubarak. I also wish to pledge our support as the entire Sedibeng District for the Springbok Rugby team in their quest to bring the Webb Ellis Trophy home.

I look forward to President Jacob Zuma hoisting the trophy after the final in New Zealand. All the other former presidents have hoisted the Cup.

I also hope and encourage the youth and students here in Sedibeng to stop this indulgence with drugs and follow the great legacy set up by the

youth of 1984 who gave so much for this freedom we so richly deserves.
This is your time to study, the opportunities are there for all of you, use it
to make your mark.

I thank you.