

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE  
SEDIBENG DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY CLLR. MAHOLE SIMON  
MOFOKENG DURING THE UNVEILING OF THE  
CONSTITUTIONAL PLAQUE, AT THE CONSTITUTIONAL  
SQUARE, VEREENIGING**

**12 MARCH 2014**

- Program Director
- Dignitaries
- Different formations present
- Historians
- People of Sedibeng

Program Director

A nation without history is questionable. A nation that denies history will soon be perished.

As I stand here amongst historians, academics and activists in different spheres, they will attest to my assertion that 'a nation without history is questionable and also a nation that denies its history will soon be perished.'

Program Director

As we commemorate the Human Rights month, I find it interesting how this month has a link with Black History Month, an annual observance in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for remembrance of important people and events in the history of the African diaspora.

Black History is celebrated annually in the United States and Canada in February and the United Kingdom in October.

The precursor to Black History Month was created in 1926 in the United States, when historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week."

The week was chosen because it coincided with the birthday of Abraham Lincoln on February 12 and of Frederick Douglass on February 14, both of which Black communities had celebrated together since the late 19th century.

The emphasis was placed on encouraging the coordinated teaching of the history of African American in the nation's public schools.

You may be curious as to why I refer to history divided on racial lines? It is simply because our own history has been divided on similar racial lines.

Now that our Democracy has matured into its first 20 years, we too must have the political and racial maturity to begin to tell our story shared across the racial divide and appreciated by all our people, black and white.

So how do we aim to do this?

We have started in the last year or so, to begin to layout a truly unique and captivating story of the Constitutional Epochs of our country and their association with the people and events of the Vaal.

Over the next few years, we will roll out a comprehensive program to record, analyse, research, project and promote the story of the Constitutional Epochs.

### Program Director

Vereeniging was founded in 1892 and is situated on the banks of the northern loop of the Vaal River. The term ‘Vaal River’ is significant hence our proposal for the Metro which has passed, has won the proposed name ‘Vaal River Metropolitan Municipality’.

Much of Vereeniging early growth was due to the nearby coal mines.

Vereeniging, which is a city, is known for being the location where the Treaty of Vereeniging ending the Second Boer War (1899–1902) was concluded.

During this conflict, a concentration camp was set up by the British military in the area. The concentration camp at Vereeniging

was set up in September 1900, and by October 1901 it housed 185 men, 330 women, and 452 children.

Conditions at the camp were very poor, water was brought by cart (there was no direct water supply) and only 24 latrines. Inmates lived in bell-tents but there was a dispensary and a school.

When you look at the site today, where the concentration camp was, you will find that it has been replaced by the Maccauvlei Golf Course.

Vereeniging is one of the first municipalities in South Africa to provide better housing for Africans.

Program Director

Vereeniging has a motto which I hope we all know, which goes; *Per Pacem ad Industriam* (Through peace to industry).

We are one of the most important industrial manufacturing centres in South Africa. Our chief products being iron, steel, pipes, bricks, tiles and processed lime. Several coal mines are also still situated in the area, with reserves being estimated at four billion tons. Other mines nearby extract fire-clay, silica and building stone.

Vereeniging has been mentioned as the town in South Africa which has the most vehicle dealerships per square metre. So if you want a car this is the right place.

### Programme Director

As we gather here to unveil the Constitutional Plaque, we do so in remembrance of the first black president Ntate Nelson Mandela, one of the signatories of the Constitution of 1996. Due to his untimely death, we had to postpone this unveiling from the 10<sup>th</sup> December last year to this day.

It is for this reason, amongst others, that Ntate Mandela will always be remembered for his views on reconciliation and unity.

We are guided by the Sedibeng District Municipality's Geographical Name Change Policy which intends to ensure proper standardisation of geographical names and to process suggestions for name changes coming from communities of Sedibeng region.

The standardisation, changing and correction of names of places must be seen within the broader context of the transformation and preservation of the heritage of Sedibeng District in line with the Provincial and National Government policies.

The policy therefore, provides effective guidelines for Geographical names changes in the Sedibeng District Municipality. By changing the grounds on which we are now standing which are the physical address of our Municipality to Constitutional Square it shows the seriousness of the Municipality in correcting the injustices of our past. I have also argued in the

past that we cannot have a name such as Houtkop and Kafferskraal in this day and age.

## Programme Director

As the Sedibeng District Municipality together with the people of Sedibeng, we cannot be left behind in telling our good stories.

The construct of the Monument and Freedom Walk is underway in the next few financial years. The Sedibeng District Municipality has developed a twenty year plan contained in the Sedibeng Growth and Development Strategy which has been aligned to the five year plan of Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

In the first 5 years of our Growth and Development Strategy and IDP between 2007-12 financial years we have improved the investment climate to boost investor confidence into Sedibeng region.

This is manifested by growing retail, services, tourism, agriculture as well as the crowding in of investment along the development corridors and nodes such as R59, R42, N1 and R82.

In the last three years there has been opening of one of the biggest Makro store in the region valued at R20 million investment. This is an expansion of Bedworthpark Centre to include Builders' Warehouse, new franchises to the value of R10 million, expansion of shopping centres in Sebokeng, Evaton to the value of about R120 million and Three Rivers, at River Walk to the value of about R40 million with a lot of job opportunities and SMMEs development in construction as well as services sector.

The biggest three programmes for service delivery are the R1 billion investment in the region, at SAMACOR Metalloys Plant by BHP Billiton, programme of the Regional Sanitation Scheme to the value of R3.7 billion and the expansion and unbundling of DCD Engineering to set up DCD Ringrollers plant at the value of R380 million.

Other strategic investment and growth are in the establishment and running of Heineken Plant in the region, Liquid Fuel Mass Storage Hub with a petroleum pipe from Durban and R400 million Coca cola plant to bottle Valpre water.

The Sedibeng District Municipality has facilitated a lot of these developments including coordinating and providing investment facilitation between some of the investors and local municipalities to ease the process of application and approval turnaround time through One Stop service.

The greatest measures were to set out a vision about the economic trajectory and the tractions of the Sedibeng Growth and Development Strategy which has improved the efficiency in processing and management of development and investment application as opposed to investors 'knocking' many doors before approvals.

The other improvement is in the ability to re-position and diversify the regional economy to decrease reliance over themanufacturing to begin to grow in Tourism, Agriculture, Services, Retail and Wholesale which has grown to providemuch needed jobs.

### Programme Director

The Sedibeng District Municipality continues to be successfully in rolling out the Community Works Programme and Expanded PublicWorks Programme (EPWP) to create short term relief and linking poor Wards in the region to income generating or jobopportunities with skills development dimension.

### Programme Director

The regional sanitation scheme has been the main constraint to economicdevelopment in the Sedibeng region and this matter is now attended to and there will be realization of flagship projects

that have been identified in the second generation Sedibeng Growth and Development Strategy.

In the longer term, a River front master plan contains many projects of vital importance to economic growth and development, linked to cross border development along the Vaal River with northern Free State to come up with complementary development on both sides of the river.

Central to long term economic development of Sedibeng region is SMART City concept that will use technology and knowledge based economy to create long term sustainable development but the road map is anchored around a number of programmes.

There is also an intention to develop a 'struggle route' Frikkie Meyer/ Moshoeshoe into Golden Highway as a heritage resource to grow township tourism, R54 as a water sport nodes linking Vaal River and Vaal Dam in Vaal Marina, and N1 as a primary link between Vaal area and the Northern Free State in Sasolburg leveraging on the land availability along these strategic routes.

## Programme Director

I urge all of us to find ways to contribute positively into preserving the heritage of the proud history of the struggles launched by the people of the Vaal.

What we see happening here today, is the best possible way to award and honour our heroes and heroines for the selfless sacrifices. I remain confident that wherever they are they are smiling at us because this is exactly what they fought for. What is therefore crucial for us is to continue with their mission on the 7<sup>th</sup> May when we visit the voting polls.

It is with this in mind that our best interest going forward must be served through consolidation of governance in our Region as we launch ahead in our plans towards the Vaal River Metropolitan Municipality in 2016. I call on all our Locals to follow in the footsteps laid today in giving our historical places the names that they deserve.

I thank you.