

**Community Constituency address to the 14th
Annual NEDLAC Summit
by Lemias Mashile
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Programme Director
Honourable President of the Republic of RSA; President Zuma
Honourable Acting Minister of Labour, and Welcome the Director
General of DoL; Jimmy Manyi
Honourable Ministers present,
Government Officials,
NEDLAC Executive Director;
Leaders from all NEDLAC constituencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Our favorable friends from the media

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure for me on behalf of the community constituency to address this important summit. It however serves as a great challenge to us that this summit sits at the time that the whole world is reeling on the effects of global economic melt down.

We find ourselves in extraordinarily challenging times under this unfavorable global economy. Unless we avert it in some way, it will for sure have long term implications for our young democracy and our intended social economic prospects in this country.

Having known how previous crises of this nature have affected human development and social well being, South Africa should not be caught off-guard by this one.

As we need sustained investment in our people's knowledge and skills, in order to recover from the economic losses, we must as a developing country design responses that will yield positive outcomes.

What lessons are there from economic crises preceding this one, to help us protect people's physical and social well-being? How can South Africa exploit the current crisis as an opportunity to expand to quality health care, quality education, social protection and other key essential social services?

One powerful lesson is that general strategies to maintain government social spending have often fall short of adequately protecting poor people's access to essential services. We have seen the consequences of that and we must not wait for a repeat as the achievement of our Millennium goals may be impossible.

The input we are making will talk to the following:

- a) Global economic meltdown
- b) Implications of economic meltdown
- c) Interventions

This economic meltdown came about as the world was busy dealing with their respective economic policies and the behavior of their economic institutions. The situation catches us in South Africa as we were busy aligning our economy with the global village.

Adverse implications resulting there-from require us to provide responses that will sustain our people's livelihoods. Enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa are the rights of all people. State has an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill these rights as found under Chapter 2 of our Constitution but not limited to the following:

- 1. Human dignity;
- 2. Freedom and security for all citizens
- 3. Slavery, servitude and forced labour
- 4. Privacy
- 5. Freedom of movement and residence
- 6. Freedom of trade, occupation and profession
- 7. Environment
- 8. Property
- 9. Health care, food, water and social security
- 10. Housing
- 11. Education

These rights are seriously infringed in one way or another, by this current economic meltdown. Our developmental state thus needs to protect these rights to its people.

- (a) Families have social standing and deserve human standards of living. This becomes the relevant stepping stone for social cohesion.
- (b) Societies in general rely on vibrant economic systems to provide for their needs. Societies at large thrive in the main through appropriate service provision. Yet service providers tend to collude and exploit their role at the expense of the service to consumers. Hence a call for the protection of communities against these crude service providers. Strengthening of the Competition Commission becomes more relevant than before.
- (c) Consequences of economic meltdown are in the main subjects of social dialogue. As community constituency, we stand to negotiate and defend in good times and in bad times. ESKOM should not expect communities to take their attack lying down.
- (d) The service providers must reap the rewards in good times and also be prepared to defend and protect their customer base in alarming bad times. They should not look after their interests (narrow) at the expense of the collapse of social cohesion.

Social dialogue remains a critical instrument to bring about participatory policy changes, to address the plethora of inherited and emerging challenges in our young democracy.

The nature and dimensions of these challenges have changed markedly since Nedlac was established. In our country's 15 year Review report, emphasis was placed on the fact that government has made many gains, but the challenges still remain – and if left unattended, will erode the gains made and the attainment of our priorities as alluded to in the State of the Nation Address..

We are heartened to see a new vigour and commitment to genuine participation in policy formulation by SOME government departments. However, as Community Constituency, we have for a LONG time been too tolerant of some government departments choosing NOT to engage at all or to selectively, engage, with

NEDLAC. This commitment must be accelerated and those departments which fail to honour the NEDLAC forum must be seriously dealt with. Failure to engage often leads to alienation which we cannot afford.

In the attempt to improve access to much needed services from government; to ensure that business practices remain ethical and do not exploit workers and their families, especially in these challenging financial times, these shortcomings by some government departments are expensive – not only financially, and morally, but also in terms of ownership by communities and other constituencies; economic and social opportunities are lost and flawed policies are formulated behind closed doors rather than by active debate and negotiation.

To ensure that Nedlac remains relevant as a social dialogue forum, the Community Constituency believes that issues must be addressed in the Chambers, and not Task Teams. Early notification of plans and policy directives, if shared timeously within NEDLAC, will prevent the often problematic rush and tabling of policy with inadequate consultation, which has recently seen some proposed legislation referred back to by Parliament.

Access to education, crime, health, water, sanitation, housing and food remain huge challenges that require the social partners to use Nedlac more effectively in the fight to eradicate poverty and create decent jobs.

3. INTERVENTIONS

Flowing from the above understanding, the creation and sustenance of conditions conducive for economic development under this global crisis, requires that we act proactively and in solidarity with our fellow citizens.

Taking the cue from the Bill of Rights, citizens should be protected against this crisis in accordance with the resources available. We therefore as civil society call upon Nedlac to consider resolutions that seek to:

- i) bolster the Nedlac strategy framework to counter the negative effect of the economic melt down.
- ii) Encourage our financial institutions to act with solidarity in respect of housing repossessions, vehicle repossessions, retrenchments, access to their services
- iii) Encourage our private sector to play their role in skills development, wellness programmes, health assistance and other social responsibility activities
- iv) Encourage more government investments to make up on private sector fallacies
- v) Encourage rich countries to assist and invest in young democracies to navigate this crisis.

Over and above these, as South African civil society, we are daily affected by the conditions under which our neighbors live, especially in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The better life that we strive for in South Africa shall never be achieved and enjoyed as long as the people of Swaziland and Zimbabwe, and other countries do not experience improved living conditions in their respective countries.

The levels of poverty and crumbling economies in these countries need urgent attention and we encourage our government to intervene appropriately for a better life and democratic dispensations in these countries.

Therefore, it is encouraging to see that the multi-dimensional nature of poverty has indeed been recognised in the government's draft anti-poverty strategy discussion document, and the strategy's framework is anchored around eight "pillars". The strategy document states: "In line with the adoption of a multi-dimensional nature (definition) of poverty", the anti-poverty framework must be anchored on pillars that help to "locate the roles of government, the private sector and society at large in addressing the different dimensions of poverty". It also reflects the inter-related and inter-dependent roles of these in addressing poverty.

Our social security system should also demonstrate greater social solidarity. It should provide protection for everyone by allowing for maximum cross-subsidisation (redistribution) from the rich to the

poor, the healthy to the ill, the employed to the unemployed, have to have-nots and so on.

As a developmental state, South Africa needs to intervene in global economic meltdown to create enabling conditions for social dialogue, to be transparent and democratically governed.

The policies, administration and implementation should be fully transparent and accountable to democratic structures in which organs of civil society participate.

Therefore, it is critical for the government to engage the informal sector, the marginalised and working poor more directly, and bring the fight against poverty into the centre of public life in South Africa.

Now, more than ever, the precious resources, skills and people's power we have in South Africa to address this challenge must be employed with greater diligence, accountability and efficiency. Above all, putting people first must dominate the agenda of our government, (**Batho Pele**). Failure to do this may have dire consequences that would take us a very long time to undo.

Poverty and dealing with poverty occupies much of our discussion time in the Community Constituency. All of our efforts, both within our separate federations and organisations and in the Constituency as a whole, we are gearing all our activities towards eradicating poverty and building communities.

The current technical skills shortage at local government level present challenges of infrastructure provision. Municipalities are plagued with roll-over of unspent capital funds. This area presents DBSA with an opportunity to assist those municipalities showing signs of distress on capital infrastructure.

This should include rural municipalities with less credibility in accessing development loans. Sectoral relationships are needed in this situation, like for example the Women's National Coalition who was established in 1992 and it has been part and active at Nedlac and has seen signs of growth from where it started to participate.

However some challenges like xenophobia has created some questions about human relations within the country.

The cooperatives movement in RSA need to receive a more supportive role from organized labour since the formal sector is under distress and the rich are getting richer and the poor get poorer.

3. CONCLUSION

As community constituency we sadly dip our flag down on the passing on of the Deputy President of SANTACO Mr. Molefe. The cause he charted for the taxi industry to develop and assist government in providing improved public transport is applauded. We hope and trust that the remaining collective of SANTACO will continue with the good work of creating conditions conducive for public transport transformation in South Africa. We as civil society have our undivided support of the bus rapid transit system as introduced by government. We also support the need of taxi industry to be incorporated in the system as would be discussed in National Joint Working Group

Long live Community Constituency long live!!!!

Viva SANCO Viva!!!!

I thank you all.