

**EX-POLITICAL PRISONERS CONFERENCE  
KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY: MEC NEO MASITHELA  
VENUE: PRESIDENT HOTEL  
DATE: 27 JUNE 2008**

Programme Director  
Representatives from various entities  
Ex-political prisoners committee  
Ladies and gentleman

This gathering here today, is inspired , I hope, by the spirit and determination of yesterday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of June , fifty three years ago when the Congress of the People gathered in Kliptown in 1955 to adopt the Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter remains at the centre of all the policies that govern us today. The most appropriate call made on that day and still remain relevant today is the declaration that “the people shall share in the country’s wealth”.

I therefore believe that this conference today seeks to give expression to that noble undertaking. To meet the expectations of the delegates, we have been asked to present to this conference what this province of yours has to offer to you who in the name of liberation you spent many years of your lives in prison to ensure that we all attain the freedom that we are enjoying today. We sincerely hope that the presentations we are going to make to you today will shed light on what you individually and collectively have to do to identify and take opportunities presented by the democracy you fought for.

Programme Director, underpinning the vision of the Freedom Charter for a society in which the “People Shall Share in the Country’s Wealth” is a real and robust transformation of our country. This transformation shall remain forever elusive if we are not going to deracialise the ownership and control of economy and means of production in this country. Unfortunately to attain this, as a nation we need to draw on the creativity and skills that our whole population can offer. Central to this policy should and must be a strong resolve to bring about significant increases in the number of black people who manage, control and own businesses that participate in the economic mainstream.

Programme Director, I believe that an appropriate and befitting precursor to deliberations in this conference is of course the context within which our economy is currently performing in which in more ways than one affect the very opportunities we need to explore. Our country, our economy and therefore our lives are faced with a huge burden of rising inflation, high food price, rocketing fuel prices, and rise in electricity tariffs which creates havoc in the markets. The recently released Free State Socio – Economic Review also paints a picture which calls for our collective concern. This report indicates growing rate of unemployment and the low levels of economic growth rate of unemployment and the low levels of economic growth.

Indeed we have to mitigate against this factors if we are to achieve a goal of “a better life for all”. To this end, in the same way the People’s Congress made the call that, “ the people shall share in the wealth of the country”, the 52 ANC Conference held in Polokwane appropriately call upon us to aspire for “an economy in which national prosperity is ensured through cutting-edge technology, labour-absorbing industrial development that creates decent work for all, a thriving small business and cooperative sector, the utilization of information and communication technologies and efficient forms of production and management”

I have been reliably told that individually and collectively you have your business development focus on the following

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- Agri Business
- Media
- Property
- Manufacturing
- Information Technology Services
- Building Supplies
- Consulting Services

Traditionally the Free State economy has been driven by agriculture and mining. There was no meaningful role for blacks, save for the provision of their labour. The relationship was heavily skewed towards the owners of the business with the masses only confined to selling their labour. That too was not voluntary with no right to withhold one's own labour.

These, Ladies and Gentlemen are practices and policies that confined the majority of our people to the second economy. This is the economy that has robbed many of us of our human dignity and turned us into followers in the economy rather than taking a lead. We have been left to look upon others to take us out of our economic miseries because there was just no chance to do it on our own. We had to break the vicious grip of dependence and look for ways and means of doing things for ourselves. Maybe, just maybe, this is the tonic we have been waiting for.

I have said this before and I want say it again here this morning. Our main downfall as people is that we are not innovative. We do not think out of the box. We always want to follow what others have done before. We do not want to be pioneers. The best we can ever to is to be the second best, never the best.

This Government that you put into power through sacrifices and your ballot in 1994, has introduced a host of policies that are biased towards those who hitherto were watching from touchlines when others were defining the

rules of the game they went on to play with total exclusion of others , who happen to be yourselves.

The ANC government introduced pieces of legislation like the Preferential Procurement Framework, Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment, Employment Equity Act, Affirmative Action and many others. The Free State Executive Council identified 15 most procured goods and services and further took a resolution to the effect that 70% of state procurement should go to Free State based SMMEs.

Programme Director, our focus in this regard as a government and as contain in the Free State Growth and Development Strategy is on the following;

- To intensify collaboration and coordination of development programmes
- To further improve SMME development
- To intensify tourism promotion and development
- To improve environmental management
- To increase trade and investment promotion
- To propel skills development through learnerships and internship

We have among others identified the following economic drivers to help us achieve what we have set for ourselves;

- Harrismith Transport Logistic
- Business Outsourcing and Off shoring
- Chemical down streaming.
- N8 Development Corridor
- Commercialization of resorts
- Opportunities in the gaming industry
- Opportunities in waste management
- Film industry
- Opportunities presented by 2010 FIFA world cup

What is needed is to develop a nose for opportunities. If we plan correctly and smartly we can see our “New Jerusalem”, like JT Gumede upon his return from Soviet Union in 1927. I wish to conclude by saying, believe me when I say, and I know I am speaking for many South Africans, your sacrifices were not in vain. I wish to quote from the Phillipians 2:16. In part it reads “....I can be happy because my work was not wasted. I ran a race and won”

I Thank You