



Address by President Zuma on the occasion of the Presidential Local Government Summit 2014, Gallagher Convention Centre, Midrand

18 September 2014

The Speaker of the National Assembly,
The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces,
The Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Mr Pravin Gordhan and all Ministers present,
Premiers, Deputy Ministers and MECs,
The Chairperson of SALGA and all mayors,
Municipal Speakers, whips and
Municipal Managers,
Leadership of the ruling party and other political parties present,
Fellow South Africans,

Good Morning to you all.

We meet during a sad period when many South Africans have died tragically in Nigeria, causing untold pain to many families and compatriots.

Our High Commission in Nigeria gave us the figure of 67 people who had died, but search and rescue missions are still continuing after which we will know for sure how many citizens we have lost.

We extend our deepest condolences again to the families and relatives.

I have established an Inter-Ministerial Task team that will help us to manage the disaster.

The members of the task team are the Minister in the Presidency, Mr Jeff Radebe as Chairperson, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Home Affairs, Social Development, Police, State Security, Health and the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans.

They will support families and do whatever is necessary to manage the impact of this tragedy.

We urge all South Africans to provide all possible support to the affected families.

Many municipalities will be affected in a way by this disaster. We urge Premiers and Mayors to also provide support to the families of deceased who come from their areas.

It is a great pleasure to address you at this second Presidential Local Government Summit. The first time we met in this format was on 20 October 2009 in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. At that occasion we emphasised the significance of coming together as all three spheres of government, from the Presidency to every municipality in the land.

We have come together because we all recognise the importance of local government as the sphere that is closest to our people. I have deemed it necessary to convene another Summit to meet with all of you since your coming into office after the 2011 local government election.

We have come together because we all agree that the basic services and needs of our people must be met. The fifth administration will thus work hard to achieve radical and meaningful change in the performance of local government.

The aim of the 2014 Presidential Local Government Summit is to go further than our last meeting in 2009. Out of this Summit must emerge a focused action plan to strengthen local government by getting the basics right.

Our unique Constitution enshrines socio-economic rights. These include the rights to dignity, water, sanitation, housing and other basic needs. Local government, working with other spheres, must provide these services efficiently and effectively, and in a caring manner.

Progress has already been achieved in the provision of services to many communities.

The release of the 2011 Census confirmed the great strides made in providing basic services. This upward trend is reinforced by the recent report on the non-financial census of municipalities which was released on 2 September 2014.

This report confirmed that the services rendered by municipalities have reduced poverty. The report focuses on basic services namely: water services, electricity services, sewerage and sanitation services and solid waste management services offered by the 278 municipalities across the country.

The report shows that 11.8 million basic water services are provided to households, with 5.3 million receiving free basic services.

Of the 11.8 million who receive basic water services, 2.5 million benefitted from indigent support. As you are aware, indigent households are those that qualify for rebates or services subsidies.

Ten million consumer units were receiving sewerage and sanitation from municipalities in South Africa and 31,1% of these consumer units had access to free basic sewerage and sanitation.

These are just a few examples of positive developments mentioned in the report.

I would like to congratulate all municipalities - councilors and municipal staff - who have made a difference in changing people's lives and living conditions, as demonstrated by this report.

However, as the Presidency Twenty Year Review highlights, challenges remain. We have to do better to promote good governance and the functioning of municipalities and also in the delivery of services. We should do better in improving services such as water infrastructure, solid waste management or the provision of electricity.

Other services such as refuse removal, the cleaning of the streets, the provision of parks and recreational facilities remain critically important, and contribute to building a better life for all.

These are the simple basic services that, when provided efficiently, will make our people's experience of local government a pleasant one.

Colleagues and compatriots,

As we deliberate today, we will be doing so against the background of the country's socio-economic blueprint up to 2030, the National Development Plan.

The Plan has identified a number of areas for targeted action in improving governance and administration.

Some of the priority areas to improve delivery include achieving a clearer separation between the roles of the political principals and the administrative heads of municipalities. In addition, accountability and oversight in local governance must be improved or reinforced. Management systems must improve.

There should be better audit reports for each local authority each year from the auditor-general. Government has responded to improve professionalism and the management of local government by introducing amendments to local government legislation, for example the Municipal System Amendment Act. There should be no compromise in ensuring that officials possess the necessary minimum skills.

Chief financial officers should be skilled in what they are doing, engineers and other technical staff should also be experts in what they have been employed to do. That is key solution to the problems facing local government. Notwithstanding the above shortcomings there are many examples of excellence in local government that we can leverage on.

There are municipalities that are functioning effectively, with effective political and administrative systems, with strong internal audit and financial management structures. There are municipalities in which Councils are actively involved in monitoring the implementation of all governance resolutions.

The daily and monthly financial management disciplines are strictly observed, and the annual financial statements are signed off on a quarterly basis. These municipalities are characterised by clean administration where the staff complement as a collective prioritise fraud prevention, and risk management.

These municipalities also have a zero tolerance to poor performance, and conduct regular performance reviews and implement corrective measures where needed.

We will be hearing about some of these municipalities today and will learn from their experiences. We also commit to support all struggling municipalities. Every municipality must be fully functional and efficient, for the sake of our people who need reliable and efficient services.

However, if municipalities do not improve in spite of support, we will have no alternative but to use all constitutional powers and legislative opportunities in the quest to ensure that our communities are served better.

Compatriots,

Local government exists to serve the people. That is the bottom line. In this regard, Municipalities must take more decisive action to involve communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. A Roundtable on service delivery held by the CoGTA Ministry in April this year deliberated on the possible causes and reasons for protests by communities.

Many reasons have been identified for protests. Many communities become impatient when they see services being delivered to their neighbours but with no sign of these coming to them as soon as possible. Other results include demands for municipal infrastructure, anger against corruption, nepotism and non-response from government.

Reports also include the manipulation of communities by aspirant politicians or by businesses that want tenders or to influence discussions. In some cases, people protest against municipalities even if the issues at hand do not fall under their mandate.

Because this level of government is the closest to the community, it is the first port of call for any protest action. People demanding a school may march to the local municipality while no local authority has the competence to build schools.

Local government should thus be in a position to respond or coordinate responses to these grievances. This requires effective intergovernmental relations and also speedy intervention from the provincial and national sphere on matters concerning their mandate.

To better coordinate our response, we have established an Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Service Delivery, which includes some front line service Ministers who will be working with colleagues in the provincial and local spheres to ensure that people get water, sanitation, electricity and other services faster.

Colleagues and compatriots,

Municipalities are where apartheid's settlement geography must be confronted and where a new and more cohesive society must be born.

Apartheid geography ensured that the majority of our people were housed and located in marginal areas from the city centres, far away from the economic hub and opportunities as well as from the services. This perpetuated their exclusion from the economy.

We have to meaningfully de-racialise communities and overcome apartheid-era spatial development. All residents, black and white, must equally enjoy the benefits of development.

In the State of the Nation Address, I said the Department of Cooperative Governance would produce an Integrated Urban Development Framework by the end of July.

The draft strategy, linked to the Rural Development Programme, has indeed been produced. It seeks to foster a shared understanding across government and society about how urbanisation should best be managed. It outlines how the goals of economic development, job creation and improved conditions of living for our people can be achieved.

With the projected urbanisation and population growth reaching 70% by 2030, the majority of these urban dwellers will be found in the cities and towns, townships and informal settlements. This strategy is therefore very important for government planning.

Distinguished participants,

A well-functioning local government sector is of the utmost importance to create an enabling environment for the business sector to flourish and be sustainable and for promoting job creation. We welcome the attendance of representatives from business at this summit, some of whom are already involved in partnerships at local level.

We also warmly welcome the innovative Business Adopt-a-Municipality programme. It is a helpful initiative with regards to promoting a closer working relationship between Government, State Owned Entities and the private sector towards supporting vulnerable municipalities.

We encourage more businesses to identify municipalities to support.

This will help business to contribute to enhancing service delivery challenges in the local government sphere and improve performance in general for the benefit of the cities and towns.

Compatriots

We must leave this place with an action plan that identifies what each sphere will do to improve local government with clear actions and time frames.

Every single individual in our three sphere dispensation must know his or her responsibilities to make local government function better.

We must go back to the basics in the real sense. We must commit to ensuring that municipalities are able to provide water, electricity, parks, street lighting, refuse removals, repairing of potholes, dealing with the frustrating interruption of services and billing problems affecting households.

Going back to the basics also means a recommitment to provide these services in a professional and caring manner which recognizes each resident as a valuable client.

Going back to the basics therefore will mean that each municipality will actively interact with the community and promote ongoing two way communication in every ward.

Municipalities must ensure that all programmes which are implemented at local level, are clearly communicated and reported to communities. Going back to the basics means reviewing tendering systems and dealing with corruption systematically within the supply chain system in local government.

Going to the basics also means working harder to expand poverty alleviation programmes such as the Community Work Programme, which provide skills and work opportunities for our people. Going back to the basics enjoins municipalities to boost rural development by supporting small enterprises, co-operatives and smallholder farmers in rural towns and villages.

Establishing community and village markets to promote food security will also greatly improve the work of many of our district municipalities. Back to the basics means in essence, that from this Summit onwards, local government will indeed become everybody's business.

Together, we should move local government forward.

It is my pleasure to declare this local government summit open.

I thank you.