

End of year luncheon with the senior citizens

08 December 2010

Speech by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the end of year luncheon with the senior citizens, Walter Sisulu Hall, Randburg – Johannesburg

Programme Director

MMC for Community Development: Cllr Bafana Sithole

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Speaker of Council

Chief Whip of Council

Chairpersons of Council Committees

Fellow Councillors

Senior Managers and Officials

The Senior Citizens

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, it is my privilege to welcome you all to this important occasion - the luncheon held in honour of our senior citizens. This celebration is now an annual event in our calendar and one that I personally look forward to as the year winds to an end.

Through this luncheon, we are acknowledging the role and significance of the elderly in all our communities. We honour and respect the good work that they have done and continue to do. Through this small gesture of appreciation we would like to express our gratitude to you, for all the hard work, dedication and commitment.

The elders, across all faiths and religions in society, constitute a battalion of the most stable, mature and wise people. Whilst this is the case, they also constitute the most vulnerable members of our society. These are people who are susceptible to all kinds of abuse, neglect and danger. They are ever at risk of being attacked and harmed. In most instances, this is done by people who are their closest relatives, friends and family.

The Bible in Exodus 20 verse 12 says: "respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you."

The Bhagavad Gita talks of "respecting our elderly family members" and the Koran does not allow for the "killing of innocent civilians, women, children and the elderly."

And the Torah says "rise before an elderly person and stand before a wise man." The Torah teaches us that people that have reached a certain stage in life are deserving of a certain level of honour. Old age suggests accrual of significant life experience.

Because of what you have done as veterans of our struggle, we are now expanding the delivery of essential services such as quality water, reliable electricity, housing, social grants and pensions.

A few days ago we said our last goodbye to MaBertha Gxowa who was a stalwart of the liberation struggle and a pioneer fighter for gender equality and emancipation. As one of the

major organisers of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings, MaBertha is one of those who was singled out for particular harsh treatment by the apartheid regime.

Despite repeated bannings, detentions and torture MaBertha remained loyal and faithful to her people. Together with many other veterans, she was bale to see the 27 April 1994 democratic break-through.

Programme Director, it is important to restate that the quality of society we build, will be measured, amongst others, by the way and manner in which it treats its elderly. In a developmental state such as South Africa, there will always be challenges posed to government at all levels to look after the interests of the elderly, the disabled, children and women.

Programme Director, in November 2008 the City of Johannesburg approved and implemented a comprehensive social package. This includes the following:

- The establishment of Advocacy Offices for the elderly;
- Social networking activities e.g. sport; and
- Improved access to support and assistance through the City's Extended Social Package.

I am pleased to note that these services are now available to our senior citizens across the seven administrative Regions of Johannesburg.

In the past year, we established three day care centres in Phiri, South Hills and Orange Farm and provided social support assistance to 2 030 elderly people. It is important to note that many of these households are headed by pensioners and the elderly.

We also need to find creative ways that will enable senior citizens to remain economically active for longer periods and to continue contributing to society through their accumulated skills, experience and wisdom.

Programme Director, please let me take this opportunity to thank the City officials responsible for the provision of services to the elderly and for their unwavering commitment throughout the year. Also, a special word of thanks to the many NGOs, civil society organisations and faith-based organisations that share a passion for the elderly and have become valued partners to the City on this front.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the festive season is a period of great significance to all South Africans regardless of their age, background, religion, language or social status. We are currently coming to the end of a 16 Day period where we recommitted ourselves to act against the abuse of women and children. Let our commitment extend to the elderly.

This is also a period during which the major religious and cultural groups within Johannesburg celebrate some of their most important religious holidays, including Christmas, Muharram, the start of the Islamic New Year, and Diwali which was enjoyed last month by our Hindu community.

I trust that you will enjoy the festive season, be blessed with good health, live fruitful and

productive lives and that you will continue to serve as role models and good examples to the rest of our society.

Thank you.