

2008-06-16: Joburg Executive Mayor calls on all to wage a common fight against xenophobia

16 June 2008

**Johannesburg Executive Mayor Amos Masondo has called on all South Africans to adopt a common responsibility to fight the evil of genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, prejudice, anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and all other related ills that constitute a blight to humanity.**

He was speaking at the June 16 National Youth Day at Johannesburg Soccer Stadium where he described the event as a moment of thanksgiving dedicated to the young people of our country for the contribution they made to free South Africa from the tyranny of apartheid. Earlier he delivered a similar message at Hector Pieterse Square, Orlando West in Soweto, the area where one of the youngest June 16, 1976 school pupils was shot dead by the former apartheid security forces.

Clr Masondo said June 16 events should be remembered because the youth also:-

- demonstrated that it is possible to stand up and confront what may appear as an insurmountable problem, and
- left a legacy of a high level of bravery and determination and further
- called on all of us to adopt a common responsibility to fight the evil of genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, prejudice, anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and all other related ills that constitute a blight to humanity.

He added that he would like to see youth across the length and breadth of our country follow the example of unwavering commitment set by the 1976 youth when they confront today's challenges of HIV and AIDS, poverty, unemployment, crime, racism, sexism, and outbreaks of xenophobic attacks.

Clr Masondo said the laying of the wreaths in remembrance of the actions of the 1976 youth was a symbol of saluting their courage, their insights as well as acknowledge of their contribution to the cause of national democracy and freedom.

Celebration of this day comes a few weeks after the country experienced a phenomenon of strange unheard of attacks on foreign nationals. These attacks affected both the locals and foreign nationals.

Clr Masondo who is also chairperson of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) which co-ordinates activities of over 240 municipalities countrywide, said what made attacks against foreign nationals even more disturbing, is the fact that Johannesburg has a long history of peaceful co-existence amongst South Africans and foreign nationals.

He said for years we have stayed, worked, played and worshipped together. Together we all toiled and suffered to build this economy, freed the continent from colonial oppression and laid a basis for continental unity. The joint action has also defined a framework for Africans to advance further in many ways in the 21st Century.

The damage done to the prestige and standing of our country, Masondo observed, cannot be estimated. The shame brought onto every South African (person) is beyond (anybody's) imagination.

He conceded that the question of the growing migrant population was a threatening simmer below the surface, adding that what could not be predicted was the size and the extent of the outbreak.

Clr Masondo reminded his audience that it is common knowledge that the City of Johannesburg did establish the Migrants Desk in April 2007. The Desk was meant to assist migrants to access information on the City and indicate what services were being delivered. In this approach we sought to ensure that all people were treated fairly and in keeping with the country's human rights charter and the values espoused in the Constitution.

He added that migration and urbanisation cannot be wished away, stopped or halted. The only progressive option, he asserted, is to ensure that it is effectively managed.

The SALGA leader said suggested that the best and practical solutions to address this challenge should be sought because if this challenge is not managed properly, it could have dire consequences for our future.

He said the local, provincial and national governments can make a difference. As civil society and communities, it was possible for everyone to change the situation for the better. He appealed to everyone to play a critical role in this regard, adding that there was an urgent need to facilitate a dialogue.

According to Clr Masondo, measures must be put in place to avoid tensions scaling up. He also pointed out that there was a need to contribute to awareness of raising against prejudices and ensure proper education in each school in our municipal areas, retirement homes, multi-cultural work places, faith-based institutions, sports and recreation centres and other organisations in local constituencies and communities.

Clr Masondo said he believe that this important platform (June 16) should be used to condemn:

- The violent attacks that we have seen on the past few weeks;
- The rampant criminality; and
- The malignant cancer of racism, xenophobia and ethnic violence.

He said there was a need to speak and act against those who are not committed to an inclusive society and seek to undermine the noble efforts to build unity. Those who are against good work meant to build a South Africa that is non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous, must be exposed.

Clr Masondo said Joburg is convinced that culture is not an issue for confrontation. Diversity was actually seen as a strength.

He said the June 16 gathering would like to echo ANC Youth League's resolve that "the youth must defend our hard-won freedom and our democracy with everything they have. They must rise against this thuggery and hooliganism, work with and claim back their communities. Working with organs of civil society they must ensure that order prevails in our communities and that our people are educated on the kind of society we espouse".

Everyone should strive to inspire the youth with the ethos and values of Ubuntu. Clr Masondo said this meant that it is the duty of every adult member of our society to

contribute to the proper upbringing and socialisation of young people. He added that it was important to teach the youth values such as personal integrity, solidarity with the poor, selflessness and preparedness to do voluntary work that benefits our communities.

The youth of today should honour the martyrs of 1976 by defending the gains of our freedom, refusing to be part of those who disrespect our freedom by abusing other people, robbing, raping, killing them and destroying public and private property.

Clr Masondo said memories of the heroes and heroines of June 16 must remain embedded in our hearts and minds of every citizen. Nothing should be done to rubbish the great contribution and value the young heroes and heroines fought and died for.

He concluded by saying that the courage and vision displayed by the youth, 32 years ago on 16 June 1976, should serve to inspire and motivate everyone to strive to build a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society.