

OPENING REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF
JOHANNESBURG, CLR MPHO PARKS TAU, AT THE KAIROS 30TH
ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, SANDTON, 17 AUGUST 2015

Programme Director

Kairos Community

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening

“This is our KAIROS. The structural inequality (political, social and economic) expressed in discriminatory laws, institutions and practice has led the people of South Africa into a virtual civil war and rebellion against tyranny”.

As the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg I welcome you all, delegates and participants to this World Class African City on the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the struggle oriented *Kairos Document* and from which the quotation I’ve just read has been drawn.

Ladies and gentlemen, 1985 will forever remain a very significant year in the struggle against apartheid. Those of you who were present at the time will recall that in 1985, left leaning struggle and church leaders pioneered and produced the Kairos Document: Subtitled *a Challenge to*

the Church. It was the culmination of a process that started in a small discussion in Soweto and extended throughout the country, resulting in the publication of the now acclaimed *Kairos Document*. The production of this important struggle document, demonstrated that left leaning faith base organisations and individuals were willingly and openly keen to challenge the apartheid regime.

“Supporting and justifying the apartheid status quo theologically (State Theology: using texts to elicit obedience to the state, accepting law and order and use of state violence as God given duty, symbolising communism as a threat and an evil, depicting the God of the State who exalts the proud and humbles the poor through dispossession and killings”: is what the founding fathers of the *Kairos Document* and those in the struggle against apartheid who adopted it, stood for.

Soon after its adoption and release, and in spite of repression by the apartheid regime, the Kairos Document found its way into the hearts and minds of our people, the oppressed majority. Ladies and gentlemen, the “power of the poor” could be seen when an avalanche of workers, students, scholars, civics, and not least the many faith base organisations and churches took to the streets to wage a war against apartheid, demanding freedom and democracy in our land. The political activities of our people were felt by the apartheid state which declared the State of Emergency in 1985.

The 1980s, ladies and gentlemen, as captured in the *Kairos Document*, was indeed a time of crisis: A time when the Botha regime wreaked havoc in the lives of our people in townships and villages, killing and maiming our people, leaving them poor and destitute. However, in spite of oppression, our people rose against the regime and finally defeated the apartheid state when the liberation movements were unbanned in 1990, 25 years ago. With doubt, in their fight against the apartheid regime, our people drew inspiration from the *Kairos Document* which emphasised that “There is hope for all of us. But the road to that hope is going to be very hard and very painful”.

Ladies and gentlemen we have travelled that apartheid road, littered with thorns. In spite of difficulties and countless challenges, we have defeated the scourge of apartheid and today happily live in the non-racial, non-sexist and free and democratic South Africa where religious intolerance is now a thing of the past. Every aspect of the *Kairos Document* bears a constant reminder to those of us entrusted with the responsibility to govern the country in this post-apartheid and liberated South Africa. As the democratically elected government led by the African National Congress, we adore and cherish as sacred the sacrifice and suffering made by our people in the fight against apartheid, particularly the role played by the church which delivered our freedom today. As government we have strengthened relations with interfaith organisations and are committed to freedom and justice in our land. Our world acclaimed Constitution also guarantees the right to religion and worship.

As the City of Johannesburg we appreciate and continue to recognise the history and role of Kairos in the liberation of our people. Apart from hosting the 20th Kairos Anniversary celebrations in 2005, we have, among other things, awarded the Freedom of the City to Dr Beyers Naude, a revered Kairos Theologian. We have also re-named the Library Gardens and is now called the Beyers Naude Square- a popular venue for unions, civic and other groups to exercise their right to freedom of expression and protest. We have also named an important arterial primary road in Johannesburg after Naude.

Programme Director, again as government we are committed to a policy of active citizenry, ensuring that our people, and in the context of this gathering, that the church and contrary to apartheid times, is vociferous in any of the issues pertaining to governance and the rule of law in this liberated South Africa. As government we are committed to the public good and benefit inspired by a preferential option for the poor, doing so in the spirit of *Batho Pele*. We are, indeed, an instrument that is “confirming hope, maintaining and strengthening hope”.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I humbly say that the *Kairos Document* has placed the City of Johannesburg on the map of the world. As we are gathered here today, I see the many countries from which you come from under one symbol- the Kairos World- all against oppression, conflict and suffering in the universe. As the City of Johannesburg we unreservedly thank you all for holding workshops in different parts of the world, sharing the South African Kairos experience.

In closing, there is no doubt, Programme Director, that the Kairos Document, as demonstrated by our presence here today, has gone beyond the bounds of the Church. Kairos has become a way of thinking, a formidable document, foregrounding our road to the future. In saying this, I wish the Conference well in its deliberations and look forward to a fresh breeze of reflection that will inspire the critical solidarity we as government find in the Church and that will make its presence and role as the critical conscience of society soar to greater heights.