

Renaming of David Webster Park

01 May 2009

Speech by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Clr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the renaming of Bloemenhof Park, in honour of David Webster as well as the commemoration of the Workers Day, Troyeville – Johannesburg

Programme Director: Clr Nandi Mayathula-Khoza

The Family and Friends of David Webster

Maggie Friedman

Max Coleman

MMC for Environment: Clr Prema Naidoo

MMC for Development Planning & Urban Management: Clr Ruby Mathang

Fellow Councillors

Civil Society Organisations

Faith Based Organisations

Managers and Officials

The Community of Greater Troyville and Inner City

Distinguished Guests

Comrades and Friends

Programme Director, like most who are gathered here this morning, I feel greatly honoured and privileged to be part of this occasion - the renaming of this Park in honour of Comrade David Webster. Today as we celebrate Workers Day, it is appropriate that we should also salute this son of the soil.

In the Council, we feel humbled by the fact that the Webster family has agreed to have their prestigious name associated with that of the City of Johannesburg.

Programme Director, we come a long way – paging through the book "Images of Defiance – South African Resistance porters of the 1980s" and looked amongst others, at these:

A poster with the picture of a man wearing a balaclava with the words "what is going on in our country?", "No to Apartheid death squads". The poster is produced for JODAC, ECC, NEUSA, DESCOM and DPSC by STP.

A poster with the picture of Sipiwe Mtimkhulu with the words "detained, poisoned, missing" produced by University of Cape Town.

A poster with the picture of David Webster with the words "fought for democracy, murdered by Apartheid".

A poster with a picture of Peter Nchabeleng with the words "A combatant for Life, A patriot to the end"

Comrades and Friends, in April and May we celebrate and commemorate a number of events:

The 22nd of April 2009 marked the 4th non-racial truly democratic General Elections in our country. Millions of voters throughout the length and breadth of South Africa queued to exercise their right to vote.

This act was preceded by an intense contest. Each political party sought to present a sound lucid case. What an experience! The voters were able to carefully consider and weigh up the various options that were presented to them. It should be the view of every democrat to accept, as a matter of principle that the voters have chosen and chosen well. So, Programme Director, the people have spoken and the rest is history.

Please allow me to express our appreciation to all the voters for turning up in their numbers and for casting their votes in support of their political parties and for deepening the South African democratic system.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) for having done an excellent job in managing and running of our elections.

Programme Director, I would like to believe that Comrade David Webster and many others who have travelled this road to establish a truly democratic state. These who have struggled to create a society where people are valued according to the contribution they are making to the development of our country rather than their ideological persuasion, race, creed or gender would have been proud of these elections.

On the 27th of April 2009, we celebrated fifteen (15) years of democracy. Freedom Day is an annual celebration of South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections of 27th and 28th April 1994. This day symbolizes peace, unity, the preservation and the restoration of human dignity.

This Day reminds us that it started at that point and to say that in the past fifteen (15) years we have indeed travelled a long distance.

We have learnt valuable lessons. The ANC led government is doing a decent job in grappling with complex issues of reconstruction and development.

Programme Director, one of the distinguishing features of the new, democratic South Africa that was born in 1994 is our national effort to promote nation-building and reconciliation.

In order to achieve this national reconciliation it was necessary to develop new, uniting institutions and symbols. This has marked a departure from our divisive past and I believe, Programme Director, that the overwhelming majority of South Africans – with the possible exception of a very small vanishing minority – now embrace our glorious flag, our national anthem, our coat of arms and other symbols of the state.

But, embracing a united a future does not mean that we wipe out all the memories of the past or forget the vital lessons of history. It means that we keep alive the memories of the events that shaped our history and honour the names and the legacies of the men and women who made the supreme sacrifice in a struggle to ensure a democratic, united, non-racial, and non-sexist in South Africa.

The 1st of May has been designated as Worker's Day on our national calendar.

This is a very significant day to Workers throughout the World. This is the day when workers all over the world rededicate themselves to solidarity and commit to the fight for workers' rights, the right to a living wage and human dignity.

Programme Director, for decades South African workers have been celebrating Workers Day in defiance of the apartheid regime, which never recognised this day and moreover sought to divide the working class on the basis of race and gender.

It was on this very day, 01st May 1989, 20 years ago, when many of us were participating in May Day Rallies across the country that Comrade Webster was assassinated.

These rallies were taking place during the second consecutive State of Emergency, one of the cruelest periods in our nation's history. The resistance to apartheid was being brutally suppressed and this resulted in many of our townships becoming areas of civil conflict. The jails of Apartheid South Africa were filled with many patriots, who like David Webster dared to say NO to Apartheid, repression and oppression!

Programme Director, I am pleased to announce that as from today, Bloemenhof Park will be known as David Webster.

I believe that it is very appropriate that we use this symbolic day, the 01st of May 2009, the day in which Comrade David Webster was assassinated twenty (20) years ago, to honour the life and times of this giant of our liberation struggle.

Comrade David Webster was born on the 19th of December 1945, right here in Troyeville. He was a social anthropology lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. He played a prominent role in various anti-apartheid organizations. These included End Conscription Campaign, the Detainees Parents' Support Committee, the Detainees Support Committee and the Five Freedoms Forum.

Comrade David Webster's great strength was seeing himself beyond his membership of a particular organisation. His vision was always broad. For him dedication to a new transformed South Africa meant all progressive organisations and individuals were important.

Sadly, Cde Webster was killed before a new South Africa was born. Although his murder was the subject of at least seven investigations - including the Harms Commission of Inquiry and an internal military inquiry - no one has ever been prosecuted. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage those who know something about this murder to come forward.

Programme Director, the City Johannesburg would like to make a contribution to our collective memory by honouring the names of those who are the architects of our democracy. Through the naming of parks, streets and public spaces we are acknowledging those heroes and heroine of our struggle for making 27th April 1994 democratic breakthrough a reality. We are grateful to all of them for the courage, their commitment, guidance and leadership.

The City of Johannesburg considers the naming of public spaces as an opportunity for citizens to etch their history, to celebrate their encounters, as well as our collective experience.

Through this programme we seek to restore the dignity. We seek to deepen service delivery and the process of transformation. This entire process cannot be divorced from the broader societal ongoing change.

Ours has been and will continue to be an inclusive approach. In the naming and renaming of streets, residential areas and public spaces we pay special attention to a thorough process of consultation.

In developing the City of Johannesburg naming and renaming policy we invited input from the public and we even extended this period for 30 days to ensure full public participation. We held a series of workshops in all seven administrative regions of the City. Out of these submissions and public participation we have extracted a policy on naming and renaming which includes the following key features:

A broad agreement that existing names that are considered offensive, derogatory, meaningless, duplicated or misspelled should be removed and replaced.

We focus on new names that will promote goodwill, assist in building a sense of ownership and community, increase the marketing potential and investment attractiveness of an area.

We expect that any application for renaming should be supported by a detailed motivation. This also underscores the principle that naming of unnamed features should receive priority attention.

As also set out in the Municipal Systems Act the naming and renaming must be consultative. This process starts with the engagement of ward councillors, the placement of notices at prominent sites and public offices, the publication of advertisements in the local media and the holding of public meetings. The extent of this consultation is, obviously decided by the size and symbolic value of a specific feature – for example the naming of a main road will require a more rigorous campaign than the naming of a terrace.

Our policy makes it clear that we give preference to names that celebrate important events or are thematic such as our fauna and flora or geographical features.

As a broad approach the names of living persons should be avoided. We do however; believe that the contribution of outstanding South Africans from all walks of life to better the lives of our residents through their acts of bravery or love should be recognized. In such exceptional circumstance a detailed motivation is required. This should be accompanied by demonstrable support from the concerned community.

Programme Director, let me acknowledge that there has been times when criticism about decisions to change the names of streets and important buildings in Johannesburg and in the rest of the country. In many instances criticism has been driven by a narrow and partisan political agenda. An attempt to present name changes as falling outside of agenda of development.

Let me once again assure you that this City does not take decisions on name changes very lightly. In each and every case, we follow a lengthy procedure that includes public participation. We also act in such a way that what we do is in compliance with the requirements of all relevant legislation, the City's own by-laws, policies and regulations.

Our actions today to rename this Park in the City in memory of David Webster takes all factors into account.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a small gesture of appreciation to Cde David's family, neighbours, the community and friends. But we the people of South Africa owe him an immense debt of gratitude.

Hospitals named after our heroes and heroines should deliver quality health care.

This park must be well looked after and kept clean;

Roads should not have potholes; and

In a word, public servant should go an extra mile by attending to all the basics.

In conclusion, let me once again thank Comrade Webster's family for giving us this hero. Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades and friends, I am proud to be part of this ceremony where the life and times of David Webster is being celebrated. Let us emulate David Webster by deepening democracy, building a non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.

Thank you