

SOD Turning ceremony to build the Soweto theatre

10 February 2009

Speech by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Clr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the SOD Turning ceremony to build the Soweto theatre, Jabulani, Soweto – Johannesburg

Programme						Director
Minister	of	Arts	and	Culture:	Mr	Pallo Jordaan
MEC for	Sports,	Arts,	Culture	and Recreation:	Ms	Barbara Creecy
Chief Whip	of	Council:		Clr	Bafana	Sithole
MMC for	Community	Development:		Clr	Nandi Mayathula-Khoza	
Members	of	the		Mayoral		Committee
Fellow						Councillors
Acting	City	Manager:		Dr	Rafik	Bismilla
Managers	and	Officials			of	Council
Distinguished						Guests
The						Media
Community		of		Greater		Soweto
Ladies and Gentlemen						

Programme Director, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words. I am honoured to be here. I believe that today we cross yet another milestone in the history of Soweto.

Today we gather here to talk about a world class theatre in Soweto. The passion for theatre is growing fairly rapidly among all sectors of the South African population. It is thanks to the strong foundation laid by, amongst others, by luminaries such as Gibson Kente. We have noted that despite this growth, for many, theatre continues to be perceived by some as something reserved for the elite. We seek to ensure that all kinds of entertainment become a reality in the Greater Soweto community. There is a clear need to question the conventional wisdom and encourage new ideas and thinking on this particular issue.

This project has been conceptualised in such a way that it takes into account our commitment to use the pressure of 2010 Soccer FIFA World Cup to ensure that a lasting legacy is left behind for the benefit of the residents of Johannesburg. When the soccer spectacle has come and gone there must be something of value that is there for all to see and point at.

In the City of Johannesburg we have had to answer the following questions: How should we utilise the pressure that come with the 2010 FIFA World Cup to deepen all the work we are (already) doing through the various government departments and programmes? How do we ensure that we work in such a way that long after the 2010 World Cup spectacle has come and gone we are able to point at various quality legacy projects that will continue to benefit our residents and citizens?

The following have been identified, amongst others, as the City's Legacy Projects:

- The Planting of more than 200 000 trees before the 2010 FIFA World Cup in the South of Johannesburg,
- The rehabilitation of the Klipriver and the creation of open spaces,
- The greening of soccer fields,
- The implementation of the Bus Rapid Transit (Transport) system;
- The Diepkloof Hostel Transformation Development Project;
- The Soweto theatre; and
- The Olympic size indoor swimming pool.

The construction of the theatre will commence in March 2009 with completion targeted for April 2010. The theatre will be built at the cost of approximately R110 million.

Programme Director, the Soweto Theatre will be located within a zone of public space within the high density, mixed use Jabulani CBD development. This zone of public space known as the 'cultural heart' will include the existing Jabulani Amphitheatre (which will be refurbished), parkland, public art and other amenities. This space will serve as a focus for further development and provide for other cultural and artistic aspiration.

The final design of the theatre has been completed and it now reflects the following features:

- 420 seater main venue with an end stage, fully provided with wings, orchestra pit, fly tower and buttress.
- Two smaller "black box" venues of 180 and 90 seaters respectively.
- Indoor foyer area with circulation to all three venues.
- Multi-level change rooms, storage rooms and "green room", and
- Interfaces with outdoor covered "plaza", which will serve as an additional informal performing space.

It is our intention to make this facility a multi-purpose theatre. Apart from using it for theatre productions, music productions, dance productions, choirs, it may also be used for festivals, conferences and meetings.

In the process of the theatre development, hundreds of jobs will be created. The development will require a range of contractors and subcontractors. Once this development is complete there will be a need to maintain and manage this facility. Cast and crew members such as actors, musicians, dancers, directors and singers will be employed on an ongoing basis.

Programme Director, the City has taken steps that seek to ensure that this facility is embraced and owned by the entire community.

Let me assure you that the City does not take decisions on major development very lightly. In each and every case we follow a lengthy procedure that includes public participation and compliance with the requirements laid down by the City's own by-laws, policies and regulations. We will continue to engage with the various stakeholders in the process of this development.

The Soweto Theatre Sod Turning ceremony should be seen as the "rise of the South." It is an important part of transforming Soweto from a mere dormitory into a normalised neighbourhood. We are striving to change Soweto into a sustainable human settlement that is known not just as a place where people come from but where people also go to.

One of our key pillars in the Growth and Development Strategy is economic development. Those of you who have been following developments in Soweto would know that there are certain economic projects that are being undertaken by both government and the private sector in the Greater Soweto area, for example, the over R1 billion development at Orlando Ekhaya. This project will add momentum and ensure further development.

What we need is to see the private sector, organisations of civil society, the community at large and government, working together in partnership to improve the quality of life of all our people.

Programme Director, we are forging a nation out of disparities of the past. We are looking forward to consolidating these gains even further as we move into the future. This township where 40% of Johannesburg's 3.8 million residents live deserves better.

Let me assure you that our plans and our preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament are on track.

In conclusion, let me emphasise that for us in the City, the Soweto Theatre is also part of the bigger programme of restoring the dignity of our people. We therefore have no intention of compromising on quality.

Thank you