

Women Leaders in Local Government Dialogue

29 August 2011

Welcome Address by Councilor Constance (Conny) Bontle Bapela, Speaker of Council, City of Johannesburg on the occasion of the GDS launch: "Women Leaders in Local Government Dialogue – Celebrating the Past, Present and Future of Activism", Women's Jail, Constitution Hill

Honoured guests,

On behalf of the City of Johannesburg, I extend a warm welcome to you all on this GDS Launch, a dialogue of women leaders where we are coming together to celebrate "the past, present and future of activism."

The winter is officially behind us (I am told, since 20 August) – it has been a long winter (and a cold one, I might add). The Winter of our lives, as in nature, is a season during which we experience the pain of loss. It is during this cold season, that we tend to go inwards, and suffer from the lack of what is no longer with us. It is the season when we introspect and reflect on things we could have done differently and the season, when we all wait for the much awaited change.

This dialogue forms part of the Growth and Development Strategy launch event for the Governance thematic week.

It marks the start of an unprecedented interactive initiative which kicked off with a launch hosted by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg on 02 August 2011.

This launch event is taking place simultaneously in the administrative Regions of the City to ensure a collective ownership of the City's future growth and development path.

The key aim of the Governance thematic week is to enhance effective decision-making, improve oversight and accountability and to continue to build an inclusive governance process.

Our intention during the Governance thematic week, is to raise awareness on issues within the broad ambit of governance which includes the following objectives:

- strengthening good governance,
- sustaining the city's financial position,
- supporting and improving oversight structures,
- enhancing participatory planning and budgeting,
- breeding a new cadre of local government activists,
- entrenching Batho Pele principles in the city's workforce (both officials and councilors),
- ensuring intergovernmental alignment, innovation and partnerships and
- promoting social cohesion and moral regeneration.

This launch event marks the beginning of a journey together beyond the GDS outreach process and will be a seasonal dialogue series, using story telling as an enabling platform for changing and reshaping our lives as women leaders.

This dialogues series will be held quarterly to link to the four seasons, commencing with this Spring launch to auger in the season when we experience the thrill of the rebirth of new life, liveliness and energy.

This will be followed by Chapter 2 (Summer) towards the end of November, which represents a period of growth, development, fulfillment and perfection. It is the season for the enjoyment of the fullness of life, a season of looking outwards and one most associated with happiness.

Chapter 3, our Autumn dialogue, is envisaged for the end of February 2012). This season has often been associated with melancholy and our story telling dialogue will explore our lives as women leaders when the possibilities of "summer" are gone, and when the chill of winter was on our horizon. The time during our lives, when the skies turned grey, and people turned inward, both physically and mentally. The season when we experienced loss. When the fruits drop to the ground and when the flowers are no more.

Our final season in this dialogue series will culminate with Chapter 4, the Winter of our lives. A season during which we experience the pain of this loss. When, due to the cold of the season, we tend to retreat inwards, and suffer from the lack of what is no longer with us. When we dwell in retrospect on things we could have done differently and long for change.

That's what we have in store for "Women Leaders in Local Government Dialogue" for the remainder of the year, so ladies, watch this space!

Perhaps a brief explanation, on why we chose this venue, the Atrium at the Women's Jail in particular. This was to enable our keynote speaker, Cnr Mally Mokoena, to take us into the past as a former detainee at this site, to share with us the learnings and lessons that have brought her to this space in her life and for us then to collectively use this experience to transport us into a future, as women leaders, as mothers, as sisters, as partners --- more enriched and grateful.

Our tales and stories seek to take participants on a compelling journey down memory lane, using memorable stories to bring out key life lessons. Whilst some of the stories we share may take us down a path of emotion and adversity, our stories no doubt are told to bring to light the journey to success. Our setting in sharing these stories, whilst capturing attention, also strives to establish rapport amongst us as women from diverse backgrounds and "herstories".

This sharing transcends the petty desire for information about another's personal life, but opens a window to catch a glimpse of what it took to make a leader, the caliber of our keynote speaker and other great leaders seated here amongst us today. The story you will hear today, will live on and become a part of the rich tapestry of experience that we collectively share as women in the hope that we can begin a process of building personal credibility, speaking with impeccability about ourselves to each other and most importantly, sharing a message that women will remember and reflect on as part of their own journeys.

We trust that this event will begin the journey of changing our view of the world from that of looking through a linear lens, where stories end (often not the way we wanted) to a whole new cyclical lens, where the story never ends – but just changes.

This dialogue series also seeks to shift the paradigm from an unrealistic vision of leaders as heroically independent, able to shake off life's losses and pains, to a vision of us as inherently inter-dependent and entitled to support and nurturing as we cope with the transitions of living and life.

So, as we launch our Spring dialogue series, let us usher in the season when we experience the thrill of the rebirth of new life. Let us part for now with the coldness of winter, and let us all look ahead to the potential of new growth, new energy, new prospects of life.

On this note, I extend a warm spring welcome to you to this GDS Governance launch.

Thank you.