

Address by the Hon RR Pillay MPL, MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works in KwaZulu-Natal on the occasion of the TGM of the Phoenix Poverty Reduction Association, 19 October 2018

The chairperson and members of the association,
Veterans in the struggle for South African freedom,
Community, business, religious and education leaders,
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,
Comrades and friends

I am deeply honoured at the invitation to address you on this significant occasion of your TGM.

I bring you the greetings of the Premier TW Mchunu and the provincial government. I also bring you the good wishes of the provincial chairperson of the ANC Cde Sihle Zikalala and provincial secretary Cde Mdumiseni Ntuli.

A pre-scheduled meeting between the Minister and all MECs must regrettably take precedence in my diary.

Nonetheless, in these remarks read on my behalf, please be assured that I am with you in spirit and applaud your work as patriotic South Africans hard at work on the ground, at the coalface of the very real challenges facing the most vulnerable in our society.

The following words by the great poet and Nobel Laureate, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore you have no doubt heard before. It is however worth repeating at this special moment in history, this moment when our president Cyril Ramaphosa has rallied us all in the Thuma Mina campaign and the new dawn.

"Where the mind is without fear and the head held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action;

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

Our reawakening as a nation does not only require the patriotic waving of our national flag.

Your patriotism is demonstrated in your volunteerism. Your work started long before our President re-energised us in the daily Thuma Mina campaign.

The statistics I have received of the thousands of meals you serve to indigent children is astounding and highly commendable.

The 2000 loaves of bread you distribute to poor families every month has a powerful resonance with the biblical injunction of breaking bread to make peace.

The essence of your mission speaks in great part to our national mission to push back the frontiers of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

It is in my opinion a crucial contribution to uniting our people and building our country.

Many have walked the path you do. We must rally many more into this patriotic duty to do whatever we can, wherever we are and with whatever we have.

Please allow me to pause for a moment to recognise a hero of South African freedom whose spear fell earlier this week.

Cde Eric Stalin Mtshali, Order of Mendi in silver for bravery, is a veteran of the South African Communist Party, the African National Congress and among the founders of Umkhonto we Sizwe. May I request that we rise to honour his memory as well as the gallant freedom fighters of the Phoenix community who are no longer with us. May their souls rest in eternal peace, may their spirits drive us into continuing their work.

The new energy and the new hope must inspire us. A fortnight ago the community of Ward 71 in Shallcross, Crossmoor, Bottlebrush and Moorton elected a 26 year old human rights lawyer with a powerful record in community work not unlike yours as its councillor. Previn Vedan's victory by a whopping 469 vote majority was under the banner of the ANC. It is historic in that it is for the first time that the ANC has won a ward in Chatsworth. More significantly, it is a symbol that our people are as Gurudev writes awakening to the enormous possibilities of the new energy, the new hope and indeed the new generation he represents.

Many of you in this organisation have worked in these patriotic missions for many years. I have been honoured to have worked with some of you. Our collective challenge is to inspire a fresh generation, support them and be prepared to be led by them.

Believe in the power and the potential of our youth. Help equip them with the tools to make the sort of impact you have made in our communities. Be alert to the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and what that

translates for our education system and the capacities of our young people. The targets in our National Development Plan demand far higher levels of competence than we currently have. We need to equip our young people for a rapidly evolving global economy and a new technological age.

Our optimism is well placed. The successes being notched up under President Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership are commendable. The pledge to raise \$100 million in investment over the next five years is yielding fruit. The Jobs Summit just concluded and the commitments from that brings us new promise. There will be a major investment conference in a few days. All this must inspire us and communicate the message to people in this hall and outside that a better future is possible if we rally together to unite our people and build our country.

While that optimism is credible, we should be under no illusions of the challenges that face our country. Please allow me to briefly summarise a few:

We need to grow the economy to create the jobs our people desperately need

We need to fight corruption at every level from right where we live and work to the highest offices in the land. Work like that being done through the Zondo Commission must inspire us that we are taking back our country from those who have tried to capture it.

We must transform our economy so that everybody can get a share and that it is not only the rich that get richer.

We must build a capable state at every level in the public service and beyond.

We must also work hard at unity and the programme that our government calls social cohesion. A Provincial Council of Social Cohesion was recently launched. It is co-chaired by the Premier and Bishop Emeritus Rubin Phillip. I urge you to work with the Council and give it your full support. The bishop is on a series of community consultations. The very important work you do merits consideration by the Council and I ask that you to make contact with him.

Our cohesion as a nation is being attacked on many fronts. We have seen xenophobia rear its ugly head very close to here. We have seen ugly racist utterances and racist behaviours - the latest in the news by one Kessie Nair. It is imperative that we immediately condemn those who seek to divide our society. Do not tolerate racism in any form, not even in idle conversation and especially on social media. Condemn racism, condemn any attempt to divide our people whatever the motivation.

I am energised by the new dawn. I am inspired by your work in poverty alleviation. Let us again rally in the spirit of activism to make more of a difference. We have earned our space in our democracy. Claim your space as we together move our country forward.

I thank you for your attention.