



## Summary of DDP Public Forum on State of the Nation Address

Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, at Southern Sun – Elangeni, Durban

### Presenters:

**Dr. Mcebisi Ndletyana**, Senior Research Specialist of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC);

**Dr. Siphamandla Zondi**, Executive Director of the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD)

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The aim of the public forum was to deeply analyze and interrogate the State of the Nation Address (SONA) that was delivered by the Honorable, President JG Zuma on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2010. It was also to discuss the policies that government has committed itself to implement in government programmes.

The discussions also included the leadership style of the current administration and how it has stamped or failed to stamp its executive authority on providing a clear national agenda. SONA failed to raise some issues that were affecting socio-economic needs of the people.

### Speaker's Input.

Dr. Mcebisi Ndletyana argued that SA was still faced with challenges of being affected by global recession which has resulted in a massive number of unemployed people, as well as the involvement of unemployed youth to violent protest on service delivery. He suggested that the leadership will have to make hard decisions and compromises in order to deal with these challenges.

He presented two kinds of leadership that the leadership could opt for within current challenges. On the one hand there is **managerial** leadership, where the leadership does not change the status quo, and uses failed methods and still expect different results within the limited resources. On the other hand there is **transformative** leadership where hard decisions are taken without making too many promises and realistic socio-economic programmes are delivered within the limited resources.

Dr. Ndletyana observed that the current leadership is trapped to symbolism that has identified with the poor and working class, as this has resulted in leadership failure to make hard choices that are perceived

as compromising the working class. He suggested that such hard decisions among others should be reforms in labor laws and an industrial strategy that will attract foreign investors.

He further criticized policies of political deployment and affirmative action in the public sector, and argued that these policies have failed to attract black middle class and skilled white people to the public sector, as this sector is characterized with low standards and inability to offer competitive labor salary packages compared to the private sector.

He warned that the perceived inability of leadership to make hard choices and continued sympathy to the working class, were equal to managerial leadership style that was embedded to symbolism and ran the risk of failure to meeting current challenges. He cited an example of demonstrated failed executive authority on the side of leadership to discourage public representatives when they bought expensive cars whilst the poor and working class suffered from global recession.

Dr. Siphamandla Zondi, argued that the SONA was flat and boring as it failed to provide a clear national vision and lost an opportunity to inspire a people in difficulty on a journey for a better life.

He argued that business slogans in government such as “business unusual”, “smarter and faster”, on one hand were encouraging consumerism in government services and compromised citizenship, on the other hand the poor and working class failed to identify with these business slogans given their socio-economic conditions.

Dr. Zondi also argued that the SONA was supposed to provide hope and inspiration that was linked to government programmes, and that it was the business of ministers to provide detailed policy imperatives and figures to government programmes.

He emphasized that SONA was meant to provide a shared vision and hope for a brighter future to the nation. SONA was not neither a report back platform nor a platform for a governing party to give in to opposition parties’ demands and expectations.

He argued that the current leadership lacked a vision, a character and mission that were going to uniquely create its own legacy. He further observed that previous administrations left legacies. On one hand former President Nelson Mandela left a legacy of national reconciliation and on the other hand former President Thabo Mbeki left a legacy of African Renaissance.

He argued that a leader and/or head of state should be guided by the following leadership principles in leading a nation:

- Have a **Vision**;
- Provide **Inspiration**;
- Guided by the **Context**;
- Focus on **Nation Building**;
- Walk Along in a **Desired Future**;

- Be willing to **Compromise** and **Sacrifice**;

He argued that the current administration under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma has failed to demonstrate the above mentioned leadership principles for the nation.

**Some of the Plenary Comments and Questions:**

- One of the participants commented that SA is characterized as a nation with massive inequalities between rich and poor, with the first and second economy. Does this mean that the President may have to deliver two SONA speeches? Another participant responded with an observation that problems around 24,8% electricity tariff hike and the effect of global recession affected everyone in society irrespective of their social class status, race, rich and poor;
- Plenary observed that the government does not have a clear industrial strategy geared to create sustainable jobs, one of the participants argued that about 900 000 jobs were lost last year and there was no clear recovery plan in place to get the retrenched people into the labor market again;
- Another observation was that, there was absence of social cohesion and a lack of shared vision among South Africans. Participants observed that citizens came from the historically diverse societal background, due to apartheid system and there has never been any engagement among South Africans after 1994 to build a one nation, with shared vision and goals for a prosperous nation;
- One participant posed this question, *'What was going to be the legacy of President Jacob Zuma?'* Both speakers responded by being in agreement that it was not clear apart from that, the current leadership was trying to repeat and/or restore the legacy of symbolism around national reconciliation.