

# Welcoming Remarks to the Human Rights Day Celebrations presented by BCMM Mayor, Cllr Xola Pakati,

18 March 2018

**Programme Director, Honourable MEC Pemmy Majodina**

**Members of the Mxenge Family**

**Minister of COGTA, Honourable Zweli Mkhize**

**Premier of the Eastern Cape, Honourable Phumulo Masualle**

**Members of the Provincial Legislature and Councillors Present**

**Members of the Community**

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon!

Allow us to greet you all and formally welcome you here today. Our gathering here is occasioned by the unfortunate events of the 21st of March 1960 where 69 black people were shot dead and 180 were serious wounded for merely protesting unjust laws.

The events of that day at Sharpville shocked the whole world and exposed apartheid as a crime against humanity. The Sharpville Massacre, as it came to be known, marked a decisive turning point in the history of struggle by the black people of our land. The struggle for self-determination and the introduction of human rights by South Africans received increased international sympathy and support from that day.

Interestingly, this era marked a sharp rise in the draconian laws of apartheid and it thus culminated in the banning of the two primary liberation movements at the time, the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress. In science we often say that every action begets an equal reaction, and this is why the increases in apartheid aggression led to better tactics and consolidation of the liberation movements, culminating in our democratic outcome in 1994.

There is therefore no better way that the democratic government could have underscored the significance of Sharpville than making it a Human Rights Day. Human rights were the essential purpose of the entirety of the struggle of the people of South Africa.

**Programme Director**,

The struggle for the liberation of South Africa was hard and its history is written with the blood of many martyrs who dedicated their lives for its ultimate obtainment. This is why we welcome and appreciate the decision of marking our human rights day by celebrating the lives of Victoria and Griffiths Mxenge.

This couple truly epitomised the ideals of selfless service and sacrifice for the total benefit of humanity. They had fairly good careers and they could have chosen to enjoy their lives but instead chose to sacrifice their lives for the for liberation of South Africa.

This earned them the repression of apartheid which eventually led to their deaths, with Griffiths being murdered in 1981 and Victoria in 1985. Griffiths spent some time on Robben Island and after he returned he was a target of apartheid’s death squad which later stabbed him to death.

The fighting spirit of this activist and anti-apartheid lawyer is show by the manner in which he was killed. In the testimony to the TRC hearings, the ruthless trio that killed relates how he fought them till the end. He was first stabbed by David Tshikalanga who then battled to remove the knife from his chest.

Dirk Coetzee, the apartheid mastermind for the killing narrates how it took place in his testimony to the TRC when he states:

“Then apparently Mxenge took the knife out himself and started chasing them with the knife and that is apparently when Almond Nofemela knocked him down with the wheel-spanner and the stabbing frenzy started between Almond and Joe Mamasela.”

Despite this, he continued to fight until they stabbed him 45 times and he eventually gave up. When asked at the TRC about the reasons why they stabbed him to that extent, Nofomela states that all the time they were stabbing, he was still fighting and not falling. This gruesome episode is just an indication of the fighting spirit of this true martyr of our struggle. He never begged for his life but fought till the end.

The life story of Victoria and the events leading up to her death are not less graphic than her husband. She was gunned down by four people from the apartheid death squad on her driveway as she returned from a political meeting. She was murdered in front of her children and they will always live to remember this day. The children of Victoria for sure find comfort in the fact that the death of their parents was not in vain as South African’s now enjoy a variety of human rights as enshrined in our democratic constitution.

**Honourable Minister Mkhize,**

We however need to have a fundamental discussion about the entire notion of human rights so that our people do not find them to be meaningless. The democratic dispensation has ushered in the basic human rights such as political and civil rights and we now need to engage deeper on the economic, social and cultural rights.

While the right of a person to move and live where they want to live is guaranteed in the constitution, the issue remains the means for them to do this. This is why the substantive understanding and thus application of human rights is always important in our country due to its history.

I specifically make a reference to the right to movement and settlement mainly because it is what we are confronted with as a municipality as apartheid segregation, compounded by the lack of means from our people still limits our people’s right to live where they want.

We are however making strides in this area as we ensure that new human settlements are not build far from where our people work. Our municipality is also making a variety of developmental interventions that will foster a new form of urban integration that guarantees everyone’s Right to the City.

The notion of substantive rights appreciates our past and thus assists us to design interventions that do not assume that we are all moving from the same starting point. It is therefore founded on the redistributive justice model which posits that past discrimination should be rectified for failure to do so will leave different groups and people at different starting points.

As we celebrate human rights, we should do all we can to position our government as a servant government in order to give meaning to the sacrifices that have been made during the quest for freedom. We should do more in changing the lives of our people for the better.

We should ensure that the wealth of our nation is properly transferred to the people as a whole. The sacrifices made by those who were killed during the Sharpville Massacre were not only so that we can get political power and be comfortable; we should ensure that our economy is restructured for the benefit of all our people. Economic rights are at the core of our democratic fabric and government should be geared in a manner that assures this.

In those few words, I would like to once again welcome all of you to these Human Rights Day celebrations taking place in our metro and we are hopeful that the event will be a success.

**I thank you!**