

**Address by L N Sisulu, MP, Minister for the Public Service and Administration on the
occasion of the Raymond Mhlaba Memorial Lecture**

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University,

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Vice Chancellor Professor Derrick Swartz

Deputy Vice Chancellors

Prof Vilile Notshulwana, Dean of Arts

Mayor of the Nelson Mandela Metro

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Thank you for inviting me to deliver this year's Raymond Mhlaba memorial lecture. I accepted this invitation fully cognisant that a tower of a man like Raymond Mhlaba is no trifling task. This was a man of superlative qualities, whose very name is synonymous with Port Elizabeth and the struggles of the people of the Eastern Cape, of the country – an MK commander, a trade union leader, a leader of the SACP, an outstanding revolutionary and a much loved leader of the people. What an honour to have been invited as guest speaker at this memorial lecture.

It took me a long time, however to accept the honour, because I did not think I would do a lecture in the name of this great hero justice. But about two months ago, on a cold June morning, I woke up to the heavy pain of the realisation that that morning, fifty years ago, Oom Ray, Govan Mbeki, Andrew Mlangeni and others were arrested at the Rivonia farm. The pain was made even sharper by the fact that this event almost went by unacknowledged by our people. A momentous period where almost overnight, the Apartheid forces had gained major advantage against the ANC, arresting and immediately charging the entire top leadership of the movement. And fifty years on, it passes for nothing. I resolved then that I would accept this invitation.

Against this backdrop, of the 50 years anniversary of the raid on the Rivonia farm, I remembered Oom Ray and his comrades with amazingly vivid clarity. As often happens, with

more clarity, given the advantage by the distance from the events, I remember him, but only then with the understanding of a child. I had seen them prior to the raid, clumsily clad as farm labourers and some fudged disguises. The irony now is that the disguise was so ill-fitting, so put on, that instead of the disguise it was meant to be, it made them conspicuous, even to me as a child. I remember the euphoria of the racist regime and the media it controlled at their arrest, while the country was totally gripped by the story, told through the eyes of the gloating victor, trudging on the pain and the blighted hopes of our people of an imminent revolution.

The next fleeting vision that I have of Oom Ray is a television interview with the SABC, shortly before his death, where he candidly shared that he had been diagnosed with a terminal disease and that he had a few weeks to live. And then the insensitive question from the enquirer: how he feels about it? And his response, a totally devastating response: “I don’t want to die. Nobody wants to die”. He had the ability to deal crisply with all issues from the most sensitive to the politically most intricate, with a straight face. Why am I reminiscing like this? Because I want to explain this towering hero of laughter and humanity and I hope that always, on days like this, we will ensure that he comes alive, because he did not want to die. Ours is to make sure he does not die.

I am pleased to note that the University has seen it fit to contemporise the lecture by linking the Memorial to the work we do in government generally, and in the public service in particular. Most importantly, you could not have chosen a more relevant and appropriate title – **Towards A Professional, Agile and Transformative Public Service**. Indeed, Raymond Mhlaba would have expected no less. After all, his life is a life of service. Linking Public Service to this Memorial couldn’t have been a more inspired choice. He would rank unarguably as the best public servant this government can lay claim to, always prioritising the interests of those he served and served with. What a powerful call it would be to make to all public servants to emulate the values and principles and dedication of this patriot.

I hope that this memorial lecture is but one step towards developing an institutional memory of Raymond Mhlaba’s life and times as well as those of his generation, such that the lessons that accrue from them are safeguarded for posterity and serve as a compass that can guide us through the many difficult choices and decisions we have to make in ensuring the better life for all our citizens. Thus it behoves this university and others that the life and times of

Raymond Mhlaba is not reduced to an Annual Lecture without deeper and more incisive exploration and emulation in present-day national life.

Raymond Mhlaba, affectionately and popularly known as Oom Ray, belongs to that rarefied pantheon of the stalwarts and titans of our struggle. We are eternally indebted to this stellar contribution from him and his generation, spanning six decades of unwavering commitment to the struggle for liberation, for restoring our humanity.

This is a life to celebrate and to emulate. For those who had the privilege of working with and been around his presence, we were privileged to learn and study directly from him, to understand first-hand what it means and takes to be a servant leader and a true cadre of the movement. These lessons are not for us to keep.

History demands that we should immortalise these heroes. That they should take pride of place in our curricula at all levels. That this has not been done is nothing short of a betrayal of all that we are and have been.

From the vantage point that I occupy now, I can see from a governance perspective that the concept of an Eastern Cape government would have been a failed project under anyone else. Just so that we can contextualise, let me briefly re-create the scenario. The Eastern Cape as it is now, was, as you would know, constituted of the grossly underdeveloped areas of the Transkei, Ciskei and the Cape Administration.

A new public administration was created from a Transkei civil service of 22 departments and a Ciskei of 12 departments, each steeped in its desperate culture and civil service traditions. The new dispensation would, with a strike of a pen, shrink this into one administration, somehow one culture, one Director-General, a Premier and his Executive, rendering, in the process, around 20 000 public servants from the former homelands supernumerary that had to be offloaded from the payroll system. You don't have to be a visionary to know that this would be fertile ground for resistance and that corruption will be a viable expression of this. Uncertain about their future, the public servants of the new province responded as only vulnerable public servants would, and in fact, in every step, frustrated the transition. The ANC found itself at odds with its promises of more jobs, articulated in its Elections Manifesto, while on the other hand it

had, through negotiations arrived at CODESA, agreed on the creation of a lean administration, without a clear plan of how to balance its obligations.

The laying off of civil servants meant the loss of jobs and the resultant loss of income to an area that had never been more than a labour reserve for the mining industry.

From a governance and administration perspective, the transition into the new dispensation was not well handled in the case of the Eastern Cape. The allocation and re-allocation of functions between the new Administration and national departments was a nightmare creating every conceivable disjuncture. The impact that this would have on service delivery is legendary, with the little and fragile infrastructure provided in the former homelands collapsing, the budget allocated in terms of numbers rather than needs basis, and popular discontent was palpable.

The negotiations that ushered in democracy were political, as they should have been, but from a governance point of view we grossly mismanaged it. The concept used during the negotiations and the transition (of levelling the playing field) did not seem to have applied with equal vigour in the sphere of administration. The new Administration was almost in crisis from day one and through all of this, Oom Ray had to steer the ship, a responsibility that even divine intervention would not have solved. It is a trait to say we live with that legacy and where the Eastern Cape is concerned, we might need to consider if we should not revisit the concept of levelling the playing field or else this legacy – the inability of the Provincial Administration to deliver services effectively, the poor administration in municipalities, mismanagement and corruption will continue to bedevil the current and any other administration in the province.

The problems we have and have always had:

1. High expectation that service delivery will come and come quickly;
2. Lack of appropriate skills in the new Administration. Many municipalities that run infrastructure projects do not have the technical skills. In many cases there are no planners, no engineers, no project managers, no land surveyors, no conveyancers. This list is long;
3. Following from the above, we are unable to maintain the infrastructure that we have and with low maintenance ability, its durability does not match the funding that put it in place;

4. Blurring of the line between political and administrative functions. Outside political interference in the running of administration has become rife, particularly the micro-management of the affairs of municipalities. But at the same time, this should not be so generalised that it is misunderstood. Executive Mayors have executive authority. Accounting officers have accounting responsibility;
5. Poor planning in particular for infrastructure delivery resulting in huge underspending against huge demands;
6. The disparities in the resources available to municipalities, resulting in huge inequalities of resources and therefore an inability to deliver on the constitutional mandate to prioritise the previously disadvantaged, because the previously disadvantaged are still run on budgets that do not match the budgets of the previously advantaged.
7. Corruption.
8. In the Eastern Cape in particular, a civil service culture that is not aligned to the progressive requirements of a developmental state.

Despite all of this, phenomenal progress has been recorded in the last 20 years. In fact at the last index of good governance in Africa, we have gone up from 33rd out of 52 countries to 22nd out of 52 countries in the last two years. In my opinion we can reach the top spot, in my life time.

However, we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that we are experiencing the winter of our discontent. Not a week passes without hundreds of thousands taking to the streets to demand better services. There is a call for an end to a nightmare best articulated by former President Thabo Mbeki's two nations' speech. President Mbeki's speech sums up, perhaps in detail the triple challenge of eradicating poverty, reducing both unemployment and inequalities.

About two weeks ago the Auditor - General released his report for the 2011-2012 financial year, which paints a depressing picture of the state of municipalities and municipal entities in our country.

Close to fifty five percent (55%) of municipalities and entities received financially qualified audit reports, with questions about their internal controls and with adverse disclaimers.

In the Eastern Cape province, 45 municipalities and 10 municipal entities were audited and none received a clean audit and 17 received disclaimers. According to the report, thirteen municipalities received financially unqualified opinions with findings, 13 were qualified while 2 receive an adverse opinion. The Health and Education departments which accounts for more than 70% of the provincial budget both received a disclaimer or qualified opinion. The Auditor - General states that, and I would like to quote:

“The three most prominent reasons for the poor audit opinions in this province are the lack of political will at approximately 50% of municipalities, where political leaders are not taking ownership of key controls seriously, a lack of consequences for poor performance in the majority 98% of cases; and a failure to appoint adequately qualified, skilled and competent individuals at 58% of municipalities.”

This cannot be findings that we in this city and province should be proud of. Central to the problems which have been identified by the Auditor – General is the lack of capacity within municipalities to ensure effective and efficient administration, as well as the delivery of quality services for our people.

Local government is an extremely important tier of government, and it locates public servants at the coalface of service delivery. It is here where the presence of government is felt in a most practical way. The failure to provide basic services to our people, against very high expectation and against the backdrop of high perceptions of fraud and corruption, have been some of the main causes of the protests that we have experienced in many towns and cities.

The question we should be asking ourselves here is what contribution can the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University make to arrest these problems in the long run? How does the mission that you have crafted impact qualitatively on the daily lives of our people? These are issues that you as a community will hopefully address in the interest of improving the people that we serve.

This now brings us to the essential link between the life and times of Oom Ray on the one hand and the state and trends of the Public Service and Administration, on the other. In this respect I want to focus on the ethical and values dimension, because of its particular resonance for our country and society. When we talk about public service ethics, we refer to the grounding

values of the public service with an emphasis on equity, probity, integrity and moral conduct. After all, the public service must be an ethical institution whose mandate is to protect the public interest. In the South African context, we are committed to public service delivery which is driven by an organisational culture that strengthens employee and management involvement, rewards teamwork, recognises individual effort, and importantly, is focused on the needs of citizens. The increasing complexity and demands of public service have seen the erosion of the ethical and value-base that should inform the performance of civil servants. This has encouraged a culture of inefficiency and often, the misappropriation of public funds. We are called upon to make real the dream of an efficient, effective, accountable, and responsive public service he would have wanted to see.

Allow me to use this opportunity to trace the various efforts and reforms being undertaken by government in this regard. I do so hoping that the University and the University's Raymond Mhlaba Unit of Public Administration and Leadership will submit itself to the construction of solutions and capacity to overcome the remaining weaknesses. In doing so, it will be part of the solution, and not part of the problem as some institutions tend to be.

As you know we now have the National Development Plan. The plan supplements and compliments our founding documents, the Freedom Charter and the country's Constitution. It calls on us to dream a different future – a future that is far away from the past that is both ugly and repulsive, and the present that threatens to mortgage the future of our children and country to poverty and underdevelopment.

The future envisaged is pregnant with promise, hope and unbridled possibilities. It calls on us to create a new story. And it calls on us to live that story along the way. It is a story in which the heart beat of our country is a community that has all the enablers of modern life:

- Which have water
- Which use a toilet – flushable toilets, attached to a drainage system
- Which have food on the table.
- Where people fall asleep without fear.
- Where people have a roof over their heads
- Where families can gather together in front of heat

And where every community has:

- A school
- Teachers who love teaching and learning
- A police station with respected and upright police
- A clinic with nurses who love caring for people.

These enablers depend on an efficient, effective, agile public service.

The Public Service reform agenda and the related proposals that I have on many occasions announced, are some of the first if not bold steps we have taken, aimed at giving concrete expression to our unfolding narrative. They are aimed at eliminating uneven and inconsistent standards and the nightmare of incompetence, corruption and unresponsiveness that sadly bedevils the public service.

We intend, through the reforms in the public service, to reclaim the optimism, the resilience and perseverance that embodied our struggle. The agility with which the movement responded to crises over time by adapting its strategies and accommodating new demands have to take us into the next phase of accelerated service delivery for a better life.

We aim to shift the paradigm of Public Service by addressing our failings and inadequacies with unflinching honesty and deal resolutely with the challenges that we face. The critical ingredients of our paradigm shift include:

1. Professionalise the public service through establishing a School of Government;
2. Establish a Uniform Public Service, with a singular purpose for service delivery and uniform standards, values and principles for service delivery;
3. Establish the Anti-Corruption Bureau to tackle corruption related misconducts;
4. Prohibit public servants from doing business with government;
5. Establish the Office of Standards and Compliance to make sure we remain true to section 195 of the Constitution that lay down the basic values that we should all adhere to.
6. Establishing a uniform public administration.

I now turn to draw our collective attention to some details of, these proposals whose architecture is inspired by a search for solutions to the problems we experience in the public service.

Underpinning the re-orientation and reform of the Public Service is a bill called the Public Administration Management Bill, a bold, but necessary bill that lays the foundation of where we need to go to. The bill was put out for public comments with a closing date of 31 July 2013. The public in this regard conventionally refers to all societal democratic formations, institutions and individuals in the Republic. In all, we received 27 submissions received. A good part of these came from political parties, non-governmental organisations, labour and individuals. None came from academic and higher learning institutions. **More specifically, no comment came from the University's Raymond Mhlaba Unit of Public Administration and Leadership!**

I had imagined that the publication of the Public Administration Management Bill has agitated and stirred academic discourse in the halls and corridors of this university culminating in rich debate stretching the horizons of thought and provoking deep imagination for options in application and improvement of public service. I was curious if such engagement on the Bill did in fact take place, if indeed there was an explosion of debate and a festival of ideas around this fundamental paradigm-shifting legislation. I wondered if students engaged themselves with the Bill. Given that no submission was received from this address, we have stopped wondering. Even a simple note that simply informs us that the Bill has been read would have sufficed to cure our curiosity.

The absence of comment from the University is cause for concern as it leaves us to wonder if the University is suffering from academic detachment and thus out of touch with current developments in society. Against an impossible programme I hope my being here will re-ignite our link and perhaps after this lecture, we might acquaint ourselves, all of us with a paradigm shift encapsulated in the bill. But for now, let me briefly go over what this paradigm shift is.

1. The Bill establishes the School of Government. The key objective of the School of Government (SoG) is to educate, train, professionalise and develop a highly capable, skilled, socially and ethically committed public service cadreship with a sense of national duty and a

common culture and ethos. We are determined to grow a broad front of public servants who are equipped to do the work for which they are employed within the discipline demanded by their different vocations.

Previous and existing models of public service training and development were characterised by little effective focus on the development of the norms, values, attitudes and orientation of public officials which are essential in creating a common ethos and sense of purpose. In this regard, capacity development requires, in addition to education and training, experiential learning and the institutionalisation of appropriate working practices and norms of behaviour to have the envisioned impact on employee performance and service delivery improvement.

Stated differently, we insist on an accountant or engineer, or architect who, once engaged in public service functions within the bounds of norms, values, ethos and attitudes that characterise the South African public service. So this accountant, engineer and architect **MUST** be distinctly and positively different in their orientation and sense of purpose from those that ply their trade elsewhere. This is the mark of a professional public servant! We move from the unapologetic premise that that State must train and produce for itself a brand and cadres of a special type like no other – for there is no one out there in the world whose top priority is to produce a cadre better equipped to manage and operate the South African Public Service. Yes, we would welcome conscientious partners like this University's Raymond Mhlaba Unit of Public Administration and Leadership.

2. We are prohibiting and banning public servants from doing business with government. This would enable us to close the loop holes that some unscrupulous officials have used. We have come to a determination that the most effective and efficient way of dealing with a conflict of interest is to remove it altogether.

3. Furthermore, the Bill provides for Employees standing as candidates for elections to have their contracts of employment terminated immediately once they accept nomination as candidates for political office. In this way, a professional public service is encouraged and protected.

4. Most importantly, the bill creates a seamless administration, adhering to the Constitution's rights of each sphere of government. All spheres will share seamlessly the requisite skills pool, competence and standards. This will serve to improve articulation and mobility across different spheres of government and diminish the costly barriers to such seamless and rational mobility is balancing the capacity across the State.

The reason I had hoped the bill would elicit a comment from this University in particular, is that some of the problems we are experiencing in the metro would be exactly the problems we seek to address, ie a seamless administration, with equal access to the skills pool that this country has.

For the purpose of this lecture, we must be stirred to explore whether these reforms go far and deep enough. Alternatively, we must be seeking to answer the question as to their precision in tilting the Public Service in the direction we want to see change. Sometimes it is this tilting, this nudging in the right direction that is required. We are driven to work tirelessly to achieve greater change faster. Ultimately, the objective is not to paralyse Public Administration but to improve it with systematic, coherent and precisely-timed interventions calculated to yield clearly defined outcomes. However, the dreams and aspirations of our people cannot be sacrificed at the altar of endless comprehensive search for simple solutions. Therefore what we must see as a Nation, is that these good and essential public services are managed and operated efficiently, professionally, equitably and fairly.

We therefore draw from the illustrious life of Oom Raymond Mhlaba the following qualities:

1. Oom Ray stayed true to his belief systems and view of the world at a time when it was not fashionable to do so. In doing this he went against the popular political currency of the time and defined for himself a political niche.
2. Oom Ray understood the value of sacrifice for the common good and not for the benefit of self. When asked to retract his statement at the treason Trial and be allowed to go he stood his ground and suffered the consequences.
3. Oom Ray was a public servant par excellence in the manner in which he gave his all for the service of his fellow country men and women.

4. Oom Ray was an unassuming leader whose hallmark and enduring insignia of leadership was his utter humility. Ever simple, considerate and on the look-out for the safe guarding of the interest of the oppressed and poor.

Oom Ray would want nothing less than for the people of South Africa living in a time where

- The Public Service is working for them;
- South Africa deserves and has an efficient Public Service;
- They Work with the Government to improve Public Service.

Our discourse tonight must deliver us to a single conclusion that the Public Service must of necessity continue to be transformed and re-positioned to be increasingly Professional, Agile and Transformative not as an end in itself but as a means towards servicing and achieving our development aspirations as a people.

We therefore remain resolute in our assertion that a highly productive, efficient and disciplined Public Service is a primary ingredient towards achieving sustainable growth and development of our Country.

One major achievement since democratic governance, has been the establishment of a common identity, as South Africans. We now strive for a common public service from the fragmented and discriminatory systems which obtained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the struggles for a better life for the people of this city were led by icons such as Raymond Mhlaba, Govan Mbeki, Edgar Ngoyi, Henry Fazzie, Benson Fihla, Ivy Gcina and many others. The unprecedented levels of resistance which engulfed Port Elizabeth and the Eastern Cape generated some of the worst forms of violence and repression, which included massacres, executions, assassinations, as well as the mysterious disappearance and torture of activists. The long scroll of honour include the names of patriots such as Siphwe Mthimkhulu and Topsy Mdaka, Siphso Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozzi and countless others throughout the province.

What role has the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University defined for itself at this historical juncture, and how can the capacity of such an important national asset be harnessed to consolidate democracy and accelerate socio - economic transformation? How is it that we seem to have problems in the metro when we have such institutions in our midst? What happened to the activist spirit of our universities and intellectuals? While we hobble along from lack of skills we have you here.

In complete contrast, the Western Cape Administration is very ably assisted by the research departments of all the major academic institutions in that province, while out there, the current discourse locates intellectuals in an antagonistic relationship with the state. We are told that universities cannot be patriotic; public institutions are almost urged to be antagonistic. Frank and fearless are not synonymous with antagonistic and intellectuals and academics must defend their right to clear thinking, even at the risk of this being seen as being cheerleaders of government. The discursive analysis that locates intellectuals in an antagonistic relationship with the state is inherently problematic; it equates criticism of government with intellectual radicalism, and actually restricts the boundaries of critical thinking which should include the resolution of our multi-farious challenges of socio - economic transformation. We as government aspire to a relationship premised on a desire to reverse the fortunes of this city, province and country.

During the 1952 defiance campaign, Raymond Mhlaba was nicknamed “vulindlela”, because he paved the way for others to follow. You, who have taken up his name, will need to lead from the front to help us solve the problems of this country and chart the way for all others to follow.

I thank you.