

**SPEAKER'S NOTES FOR CLLR MPHONGA PARKS TAU, EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF
THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG AT A EVENT IN HONOUR OF THE JUNE 16,
1976 SOWETO UPRISING**

16 June 2016

In an interview for a historical narrative on the events of June 1976, the City of Johannesburg's own Dr Ali Khangela Hlongwane, recounted to the New York writer, Bryan Mark Urbsaitis, why it is of such importance to keep the memory of those who participated in the Soweto Uprising alive.

In the book: *Wounded healers and reconciliation fatigue*, Dr Hlongwane, who currently serves our City as Head of Museums and Galleries, makes the point that telling the story serves as a catharsis that seems to be simultaneously therapeutic and political.

Thus, while we are in June 2016, involved in a myriad of activities to address the political and the socio-economic of the "here and the now" – it is important that we take some time out on a day such as this to recount the events of a period that changed the history of South Africa forever.

Programme director,

It is for this reason why we are so grateful that the President of the Republic of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, took the time from his extremely busy schedule to honour us with his presence. President Zuma represents a generation that joined the struggle for the liberation of our country at an early age. He was arrested, imprisoned and tortured and later continued to wage the struggle through armed insurrection from the frontline states. When the apartheid regime was brought to its knees, he took the bold step to continue the struggle through negotiations that led to the democratic transition of 1994.

I also want to thank our colleague and friend, Premier David Makhura who, like me, was too young to walk the streets in 1976 – but who was greatly inspired by the courageous actions of the students and the community who gave their backing. Together with the City of Johannesburg, Premier Makhura and the Gauteng Provincial government have contributed to the rising of a new economic democracy in our city – and especially in Soweto – where the fruits of transformation are visible around us in the form of tarred roads, new bridges, recreational parks, multi-purpose centres and libraries.

Our Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, who has been a tireless champion of the growth of Johannesburg - the leading City in Africa and a fighter in the frontline for

the continuous transformation of our country, led the wreath-laying ceremony at the Hector Pieterse Memorial earlier today.

On behalf of Johannesburg, I want to extend a special word of thanks to him and also to the Minister in Presidency, Jeff Radebe, the Minister of Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa, and the Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Buti Manamela.

A word of sincere appreciation also goes to the organisers who have made this event possible – coming from national, provincial and local government, civic organisations, youth and education formations, the cultural and heritage sectors and many of the pioneers of June 16, 1976 themselves. Your contributions have helped to make this a memorable occasion and a fitting tribute to the legacy of those who paved the way for the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The question is often asked what do we take away from our commemoration of seminal events in our country's tumultuous history? Where do we go from here? How do we continue to honour the memory of those who placed their bodies and their future on the line – and the scores of people who made the ultimate sacrifice?

Today, we have honoured them through physical symbols of our gratitude and respect. This was in the naming of a street to remember Hastings Ndlovu, one of the first victims of the shootings on June 1976; in a memorial for Dr Melvin Edelstein, a great humanitarian who was a devoted champion for the rights of the youth and the disabled who lost his life under tragic circumstances; in the wreaths we laid; the words we spoke as well as the messages we received from participants in the Soweto Uprising.

But, ladies and gentlemen, in the City of Johannesburg, we know that the future is in our hands.

We stand at a pivotal period in our history where the decisions we take today, will determine how we build on the legacy of 1976 – and whether this will also inspire and improve the lives of the generation of 2016.

We understand that our youth are not the challenge that some perceive them to be, but our greatest asset.

Programme director,

In recent years, we have introduced youth-oriented programmes that are designed to improve the quality of learning and the value of the skills of young people who exit

the high school system without the requisite proficiencies to access jobs in the open market.

Through our youth programme, Vulindlel' eJozi, we are offering opportunities for young people to rewrite matric and use this enriched qualification to gain entry into the market place. Together with our partners in business and civil society, we are matching the skills of young work-seekers with opportunities in the market place.

Our Massive Open Online University (MOOV) network takes this approach one step further, by giving young people access to the wider world of knowledge that is available online and opening further doors to learning. Through our investment in high-speed broadband, we are turning our libraries and community centres into a city-wide centre for learning.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is clear that what was started in Johannesburg in 1976, has grown into a movement that changed a country. What is emerging in the City in 2016, is certainly flourishing into an undertaking that can also have a long-lasting impact on Johannesburg and the people who live in it – particularly our youth.

I trust that the inspiration we take from this event will give us the courage, the conviction and the energy to continue on this journey. Indeed, the power is in our hands.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At one of our earlier ceremonies this morning, I quoted from the work of one of the truly great minds that came out of Johannesburg: the poet, the writer, the journalist and the social commentator, Don Mattera.

I think it is fitting to close with his eloquent reflection on the events of 1976 – written almost two decades away in a poem titled: **A New Time:**

Beyond the ash heaps of broken days

The tortured cries of starving folk

Drown in a blood of young voices

Swelling thick with the promise

Of a new time

Children singing from the grave

It is their year

All years belong to the children

The beginning years

And the end years

Earned with their blood

A new time

I thank you.