

**Speech Delivered in the Civil Society Conference – by the
COSATU President – Sidumo Dlamini**

The leadership of COSATU present here today

The leadership of Section 27, the TAC and various civil society formations present here today;

Invited guests;

Comrades and compatriots

Comrades our meeting today coincide with the two very important events in our country. The first one is that yesterday the cabinet had a special meeting to discuss among others, the government's proposed growth path. We hope that the proposals will not remain a secret only known within government circles. We hope that it will eventually come to the people.

We also hope that unlike GEAR and ASGISA the content of the government policy proposals is seriously intending to change our current growth path in which the apartheid and colonial patterns of social relations and ownership remains dominant and fully intact.

We hope that the proposals will seriously address the challenges of Skills development and inadequacies in our Education system.

It is unacceptable that unemployment, poverty and inequality in South Africa remains the dominant features that defines the structure of our society despite the fact that we are a country with an abundance of wealth. It is even worse and a shame that unemployment, poverty and inequality are still defined in terms of race and gender. We trust that the proposals focused the country into the creation of more decent jobs and accelerating a process of realising a better life for all.

We hope that the proposals contained in the government growth path do not include the social compact in which labour will be expected to compromise more than business through wage freeze!

The second event is that today the minister of Finance will be presenting the medium term expenditure statement to parliament. We hope that he will keep his focus to the five priorities which include health, education, rural development fighting crime and corruption.

We hope that this time we will not hear of things that were not agreed to at Polokwane such as Wage Subsidy which meant the introduction of a multi layer labour market with some deliberately made not to enjoy labour rights.

We hope that the minister of finance will remember that in South Africa wealth still resides in the hands of the few and he will therefore table an expenditure framework that seeks to ensure redistribution.

We hope that the minister will not postpone the implementation of the NHI and the realisation of a free and compulsory education.

This meeting has been convened to address in the main four things (1) to solicit further ideas on the COSATU growth path proposals (2) to discuss what we must together do to combat rampant corruption that has become so much of a feature for our country (3) we also would like to spend most of our energy and time discussing what is it that we can do to maintain the momentum of all the best things we saw during the world cup. We want our country to be the same and even more as we saw it during the world cup event. (4) We want to discuss joint programmes for our formations which may include taking forward the campaign on health and Education or all the five priority areas of government.

Comrades and compatriots, to those who doubt the credentials of the people and organisations that are meeting here today, I want them to know that these are people for whom 1994 did not mean an end to the struggle.

When others thought and still think that 1994 meant an arrival to the Promised Land, for the people and organisations gathered here today 1994 meant an end of one era of struggle and the beginning of a new era of intensified struggle for economic freedom and total political freedom!

This is a meeting of people and organisations who are closer to reality in communities.

Organisations that are here today do not hypocritically or conveniently identify with the people but they are the people themselves and they are at the cold face of the South African dark reality of poverty and unemployment .

They know the successes and failures of our government from firsthand experience. The issues that they take up are genuine issues that are not defined by some distant Harvard group but are issues that practically and directly affect the working class and the poor directly.

These are really mass based organisations which, because of the genuine issues they confront daily have an organic link with the masses.

These are not elitist organisations but are organisations that still adhere to the principles of internal democracy and working class leadership.

The agenda of the organisations gathered here today is meant to send a statement that to everyone that “let the sleeping grass awaken” and if it does not awaken we will use fire to have it awaken. In Zulu kuthiwa utshani obulele buvuswa ngomlilo!

The agenda that is driven by the organisations gathered here today is an agenda that reminds all of us including those in government what our freedom is suppose to be about.

Their agenda is not meant to weaken the democratic movement, the alliance or the government. On the contrary it is meant to strengthen it. These organisations have learnt from their own struggles and victories about the benefits of working with the democratic government and to concurrently confront and challenge it when it cannot listen.

I must remind everyone who is here today that this is a meeting of organisations who are still involved in combat against the manifestations of apartheid and colonialism. This is a meeting of those who are still in the trenches.

The country and the world must know that we who are gathered here today know from our own painful and practical experience that the benefits of democracy have only accrued more to the rich and have created a new elite from the former oppressed.

The working class and the poor have been sidelined to the periphery. Most of qualitative government programmes start by promising benefits to the poor and when they are implemented the actual beneficiaries becomes the rich. One practical example is the Gautrain and we hope it will not happen with the NHI.

We meet here today drawing courage and strength from the successes, failures and disappointment of our own experience.

We are encouraged by the knowledge and evidence that our government has the capacity to build millions of houses for the poor. We know that since 1994 households with access to potable water have increase from 64% to 97%, households with access to electricity have increased from 51% to 73% and that Households with access to sanitation have increased from 50% to 77%.

But equally we know from painful experience that 5 million people experienced cut-offs due to non-payment. 25% of households with electricity use firewood for cooking and of those that are not electrified, 53% use firewood for cooking; some of our people (2% of households) still use animal dung as a source of energy.

The reason for this are clear , and it is because 71% of African female-headed households and 59% male-headed households earn less than R800 a month and 48% of female-headed households have no income at all. As noted by the Taylor Commission, unemployment-induced poverty is the dominant form of poverty in South Africa. The working poor, the “missing middle” of the grant system, now suffers under the yoke of bad pay and cost-recovery policies.

It is you comrades through your struggles who have made a call that government need to get rid of pre-paid meters and abandon the cost-recovery method of financing basic needs and instead apply cross-subsidies to ensure that households fully enjoy access to electricity.

We must appreciate the fact that government did build houses for the poor but we must also say that these are not the RDP houses.

We must say these things so that everyone must know what kind of expectations we have from the transformation. We must say

what we want so that everyone must know that we are not a group of people who in the words of the people's poet Mzwakhe Mbuli "*accept everything as the best for they know nothing better*"

We must say that the structure of the many houses that have been built since 1994 are not RDP houses. The RDP was clear on what the process to be followed in building houses was and what norms were to be adhered to when building the houses.

The RDP called for broader community participation in the setting of standards and norms for the provision of housing. This process was supposed to inform the design and structure of public house to be socially responsive.

The patterns of housing was suppose to respond to the pattern of demographics, family structure and size, culture, weather and so forth. The current housing structures, particularly the ones located in urban areas, violate these aspects in various ways. For example, the number of rooms is not sufficiently matched to average family size. This leads to over-population and the erection of shacks to supplement the so called "RDP" brick structures.

The fundamental problem with the process of housing delivery of the past 16 years is that in general, public housing has been driven by tenders. This basically places the provision of housing at the mercy of the economics of profit which reduces everything to profit maximization¹

The RDP directives were implemented selectively, half-heartedly and in an uneven manner, leading to an incoherent process of housing delivery and the influx of profit-making into the process. No where did the RDP speak about houses that will have outside and uncovered toilets that we saw being built in the Western Cape.

¹ See the discussion on the Role and Character of the State in Section 5, the link between BEE and white capitalist accumulation in this regard.

Despite the political will that has been demonstrated in the last 16 years to break the apartheid planning, which sought to bring affordable housing closer to places of work, very little has changed. The process was itself profit-driven, making it unaffordable for the majority of the working class.

The lack of access to land and the incapacity of the state to expropriate land for the purposes of eliminating the apartheid planning have contributed to stagnation of progress on this front. Combined with the explosion in the property market, these factors have driven the working class further away from places of work.

It is these challenges in the transformation process of our country that has made many of us to ask some painful questions as to whether our government is in power or in office and whether somebody else is actually in charge!

It is these first hand experiences that has made many of us to conclude based on experience *“that it is possible for a party of the working class to win the elections and assume political office - that is, it is given control over the ministries - without that in any way altering the fact that political power remains in the hands of the capitalist class”*.

We know that *“in such instances that a party of the working class is allowed to administer the capitalist state, introduce ameliorative reforms, and even impose certain controls on the activities of the capitalists just as long as it does not tamper with the central sphere of capitalist political power”*.

So our experience has taught us that forming government, therefore, is not the same thing as acquiring political power. We also know that even political power alone will not necessarily translate to economic freedom.

We know all these not because we have read it from some big books but because day in and day out we live with our own children, our relatives and communities who are unemployed and unemployable.

It is us who are gathered here today who leave with the reality of HIV and AIDs. We have a reason to celebrate the National

Strategic plan and to have a government and minister that listens.

We also know what it means to be told at the clinic that ARVs are not available and they will not be available in the near future.

It is us who go through the pain of being discriminated against simply because we are infected or we or our family members have declared their HIV status. We know what it means to be sick and be unemployed without any form of support. We know what it means to have a non-functional health system.

We know what affordability means when you go to the hospital or doctor and the first question they ask is whether you have a medical aid card!

We therefore will have good reasons to celebrate the decision to implement the NHI by 2012, although we will do so with caution given that government want to model NHI around Public Private Partnership which we know from experience that is bound to fail in ensuring effective service delivery because it is based on profit motive

Comrades 16 years into democracy we still live with a reality that the colonial and apartheid character of our society remains intact. We are confronted with a double challenge to deal with the Apartheid legacy and the legacy of colonialism whilst at the same time having to remind those in office that the struggle is not over yet and to also remind them what our struggle was all about and in many instances to also remind them what the struggle was NOT about!

Surely we remain with a responsibility to remind each other including those in government that our struggle was not about creating a better chance for people to loot state resources and even claim that they have a right to do so!

Our struggle was not about converting our organisations into weapons to pave a way for better and juicy tenders!

Our struggle was not about creating better chances for friends and closer circles to secure huge business deals!

We are confronted with the painful reality of corruption within our organisations, in government and in all spheres of society and we must fight against it to the bitter end and if need be we must all be prepared to loose friends and face the possibility of death in the same way that we were prepared to die when we confronted the apartheid system.

The reality comrades is that we may think these things are happening somewhere else away from the civil society organisations and yet these very same civil society formations have been turned into hiding nests for thugs who uses them to collect fat cheques from monies donated to pursue noble objectives.

The task confronting us today is to provide programmatic proposals that will make this country to vibrate from Cape to Cofimvaba and from Limpopo to Linesia.

We want answers comrades, we need solutions and these will not come from somewhere else but from you.

May this conference be ground breaking by the type of campaigns and programmes that will be seen on the first week after this conference!

ALL POWER TO PEOPLE!