

## **City of Johannesburg DA Caucus Leader Councilor Vasco Da Gama's response to Mayor Tau's SOCA**

Good morning Madam Speaker, Executive Mayor, Members of the Mayoral Committee, Leaders of Opposition Parties, Distinguished Guests, Councilors, Members of the Media and residents of our great City of Johannesburg.

Mr Executive Mayor, this morning we meet to respond to your speech, themed, "Turning Challenges into Opportunities". It is a wonderful dream with many great potential ideas for a World Class City to strive towards in the future.

I particularly want to start by re-quoting Former President Thabo Mbeki when he said, "We must ensure that today is better than yesterday and that tomorrow will be better than today".

This quote really does describe what government should be working towards for its citizens and in our case what we as the City of Johannesburg should be aiming towards for our residents. With such a strong starting point I was optimistic about your speech and hoped that you would focus on the idea encapsulated in Ex-President Mbeki's words.

Sadly this was not to be. You see Mr Mayor; it is all good to have dreams, looking at tomorrow, and great future visions of our City. We admire them. But as the municipal government of Johannesburg, our main job is to focus on the practical aspect of making the lives of our residents better today AND tomorrow. Not just always looking to that future tomorrow.

We need to ask ourselves, when our residents look at our City, do they see a World Class African City, or do they see a City with real problems?

Because fellow councilors, when I look at a City where traffic lights are constantly broken, buildings are illegally occupied, cable theft seems unstoppable, potholes are getting larger, yet tariffs are increasing at a rate similar to Eskom blackouts, I do not see a World Class City. I see real problems affecting our residents every day. I see a reality that does not match your vision Mr Mayor.

The problem with this State of the City address is that if you are always making promises about tomorrow, you fail to implement solutions to make things better today:

For example, in your last State of the City address you made many commitments to the residents of Johannesburg. To list a few:

1. You promised that there would be free access to the internet in all 85 City libraries by the end of 2014. However we are well into 2015 and we have not met this goal.
2. You promised that we would soon have an Office of the Ombudsman able to assist the residents of Johannesburg. A year later and whilst we have appointed an Ombudsman the office is not yet near being operational.
3. You committed to the purchasing of 150 new buses for Metrobus this financial year. With less than two months left, not a single new bus has yet been purchased to replace

Metrobus's old and discontinued busses. This has not materialised and in the meantime more bus accidents occur.

4. You committed to only one housing project that of refurbishing the Helen Joseph Women's Hostel. Despite housing being a desperate need, even this one project has not started.

5. JMPD 10+, despite promises back from 2012, is still only properly operational in one region in the entire City.

Rather than going on, let me say that you Mr Mayor, appear to be big on promises, but weak on delivery.

In your speech you mention that the City of Johannesburg firmly supports going "back to basics" as suggested by the Minister of Cooperative Governance Pravin Gordhan. In fact he is quite specific in what he says are priorities. To quote him again:

"We must make sure the robots work, that potholes are filled, water is delivered, refuse is collected, electricity is supplied and waste management takes place in the right kind of way".

It may seem like I'm just repeating parts of your speech Mr Executive Mayor, but that's because I don't believe you've really understood what is being asked of you and the Mayoral Committee in leading the City of Johannesburg. The minister is not asking you to live in your tomorrow land of future promises on top of promises, but is saying we must focus on BASIC services to the people NOW.

And it's not just Minister Gordhan. You also quote President Zuma on the topic in your speech. Whilst you don't mention the Secretary General of the ANC Gwede Mantashe, he has also has stern words to say to the NEC on the topic. Gauteng Premier David Makhura has acknowledged, after the poor performance of the ANC in Gauteng in the 2014 elections that service delivery needs to be improved at the municipal level. The national treasury has also tried to guide local government on improving service delivery. And a host of others have spoken. But despite these senior members of your party urging municipalities to focus on the BASICS, we received yet another series of promises on top of promises.

You see Mr Mayor, while generating electricity from our water pipes sounds great, those water pipes are leaking. In fact we lost over R1, 1 billion due to water losses. That is up from R800 million the previous year, an increase of more than R300 million. So this is a problem that is getting worse year by year. But instead of fixing pipes, we are making promises.

And talking about electricity, we had over R1, 5 billion in technical losses of electricity this last year, an increase of just under R200 million. When you look at non-technical losses of electricity, a further R742 million, they add up to over R2 billion of improper and wasteful expenditure.

Now consider for a second what would happen if the City of Johannesburg really was a municipal government that prioritised the basics. First we'd sort out these technical losses of water and electricity. We'd never be able to completely resolve these issues, but if we just fixed even half, that would save over R1 billion worth of water and electricity. Think what we could do with that money. That money could then be sunk into the great future projects you keep on coming up with, but only after you've solved the BASICS.

The reality is that if you focused on the problems on the ground, you would be closer to reaching those dreams you keep chasing.

I'm not speaking about this in abstract. In the City of Cape Town the Democratic Alliance once had similar problems. But we focused on the basics and got them right. That freed up significant capital to go beyond the basics, and allows us to offer the highest levels of service delivery in the country. It isn't complicated Mr Mayor, in fact everyone seems to understand the DA difference. But for some reason, you have yet again chosen a path for the City that will result in our problems continuing and most likely getting worse.

Remember we agreed that our job was to make sure tomorrow is better than today?

Mr Executive Mayor you have mentioned some massive projects, such as the new Vulindlel' eJozi, the Broadband project and Jozi @ Work. With them you link amazing possibilities such as creating 200,000 new opportunities for the youth, creating thousands of jobs, and having a free open on-line university courses offered at our libraries. Again these prospects are exciting. But we have to look at the history of the success of such projects in the City of Johannesburg.

Currently a large amount of our efforts to become a Smart City are linked to our Broadband project. But whilst you mentioned it as briefly as possible in your speech Mr Mayor, the reality is that the project has been a disaster and we are currently undergoing a legal effort to reclaim our broadband system. In order to do so we have to spend around R1, 2 billion. The City isn't really sure when we'll manage to secure the broadband system and even when we do we'll have to confront the question of whether we can actually run a massive system like this as a Municipal Owned Entity. That ignores the question of whether we can be competitive in the booming broadband game.

The Vuulindlel' eJozi project has already received great interest from the media. Who wouldn't be interested in 200,000 new opportunities for the youth. But a look at the actual reports around the project. They suggest the project may only actually create as many as 6000 job opportunities in practicality.

Mayor Tau, I believe I've made my point. Your promises don't cut it anymore. They don't cut it with the Democratic Alliance and more importantly they don't cut it with the residents of Johannesburg. And if you don't believe me, just wait to see which party is implementing a BLUE Economy in the City of Johannesburg in 2016. Because the BLUE Machine is coming to bring a dose of good service delivery for Johannesburg, bringing our expertise to benefit the residents of our great City by focusing on the basics.

Because Mr Mayor. Tomorrow will be better than today. With the DA."

Regards,

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