

DEBATE ON THE VUWANI SITUATION

MINISTER DAVID MAHLOBO, MP

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, CAPE TOWN

17 MAY 2016,

Madam Speaker

Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Honourable Members

Fellow South Africans

1. The ANC led government as mandated by the majority of our people since 1994, reaffirms its commitment to the attainment of a national democratic society as envisioned in the Constitution of our land, the Freedom Charter and other founding documents. Building a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society is a long and arduous journey which our former President Nelson Mandela spoke of when he said “*Yinde lendlela esiyihambayo*”.
2. This society could not just emerge on the dawn of our democratic dispensation but needed to be harnessed and built consciously by all the progressive forces of fundamental change as led by the ANC.
3. Over the last few months we have witnessed incidents of major concern to the life of our South African society. We cannot claim to be truly free when wanton destruction of property, violence, intimidation and killings continues unabated in our society.

4. The entire nation was brought to tears when more than 20 schools went up in smoke in Vuwani, Vhembe District in Limpopo and surrounding villages two weeks ago. Words cannot express the untold suffering that has been meted by humanity on young people, our future. These prophets of doom, backwardness and counter revolutionaries have no place in our democratic society.
5. This untold suffering was aptly captured by a Congress of South African Students (COSAS) representative Ms Mishumo Netshisumbewa, who speaking during a prayer service over the weekend had this to say: *“Parents please, stop burning our schools; you are burning our future”*
6. In less than a month we will be celebrating 40 years since the historic June 16, 1976 SOWETO uprising. Our icon, the leader of our movement, President O.R. Tambo eloquently articulated the value of young people when he said: *“A country, a movement, a people, that does not value its youth, does not deserve its future”*. What kind of a nation and people have we become when we use the future of our next generation to advance a genuine cause at their expense? Shame on you cowards who have no revolutionary cause and consciousness. The tears of Vhembe district learners cannot be in vain.
7. At the height of student uprising, President Tambo had to issue a stern warning, a clarion call and warned against the destruction of public schools.
8. The phenomenon of burning schools, libraries and university buildings in the name of voicing grievances cannot be tolerated. It is an attack against the future of our children and must be condemned by all peace loving South Africans. There are elements hell-bent to cause anarchy and lawlessness.
9. Indeed the country and her people needs to deepen its value to the youth and harness its potential. The youth in our country, like young people everywhere in the world, are searching for genuine ideals and values which they can live by, and for revolutionary ways to win them.

10. Madam Speaker, on the 29 April 2016 the Limpopo High Court dismissed an application by the Traditional Leaders of the affected communities to set aside the Municipal Demarcation Board's decision on the establishment of the new municipality in the Vhembe District.
11. On the 1st of May 2016 the Pro-Makhado Task Team and Traditional Leaders addressed the community at the Vuwani Sports Ground, and resolved to disband the Task Team. What followed thereafter was a wave of violent unrest that exploded in the Mashau, Masakona, Doli, Masia, Bungeni and Vyeboom areas, in the form of:-
 - a. 26 schools damaged (11 totally burnt down and 15 partially burned and damaged)
 - b. Blocking of major routes with tree trunks, rocks, stones and pipes. This also includes an isolated incident wherein a truck dropped sand in the middle of the road to block access.
 - c. 1 SAPS trailer burnt
 - d. 1 purification system damaged
 - e. 2 trucks belonging to a contractor and guard room burnt (Nandoni)
 - f. 3 DPW trucks burnt and a store room (Vuwani)
 - g. 18 private vehicles windows smashed
 - h. 5 SAPS vehicles smashed by stones
 - i. 4 burnt houses, 1 Tribal authority office and satellite police station damaged
 - j. Attacking and ambushing the Police vehicles patrolling the area and
 - k. Targeted attacks to specific community members and Councillors
12. During the Presidency Budget, HE President Zuma, he announced a team that had to be dispatched to support the Limpopo provincial in dealing with situation prevailing.
13. In our assessment, the violence and destruction of property seen in Vuwani and surrounding villages is driven by few individuals, in leadership positions, whose economic and political interests are threatened by the process of demarcation. They are also individuals who want to use the demon of

tribalism and ethnicity to fuel conflict amongst the community which has been hitherto living side by side in peace.

14. It has been observed that the use of ethnicity, racism and religion is one of the most dangerous things to kill societies and starts endless wars. Therefore we should refuse to the part of those who want to wake up the demon of tribalism, which we buried in 1912, to destroy our communities. Verwoed and other architects of apartheid and racists South African ghost should not be awakened for they belong to the dungeon of darkness and not in our beautiful land.
15. We must thank His Majesty the King of the Ba Venda Nation, Toni Mphephu Ramabulana for his unwavering support and commitment to restore normalcy.
16. We must also thank the Traditional Leaders who, despite their preferences with regard to the demarcation issue, condemned the violence and have called for calm.
17. Together with the leadership of the Limpopo Provincial Government, the district and local municipality leadership, we worked and spoke with one voice.
18. We walked the streets clearing the roads and ensuring that people are able to go to work. We held a series of community engagements with various stakeholders and communities in a number of villages, culminating in a prayer service over the past weekend where our message was clear: let's allow for kids to go to school and for normalcy to be restored and let's engage on a journey to sit around the table and resolve the issue of demarcation.
19. The response from our security forces and law enforcement agencies led by the SAPS has been commendable. They have been working under very difficult conditions, in a vast terrain that lends itself to various ambush attacks. They have been able to contain the situation and ensured that relative peace is brought to the area even though some elements continue to instil fear.
20. A total of 23 suspects have already arrested. 35 cases of arson opened with 7 suspects; 34 cases of malicious damage to property with 14 suspects and 2

additional suspects were arrested yesterday. Investigations are continuing and we envisage more arrests.

21. We are encouraged by the process that started on Monday 16 May 2016 to ensure that schools reopen. This is going to be a gradual process given the element of intimidation and fear in certain communities. Our deployments in terms of security personnel will remain in place for as long as necessary.
22. We will do everything in our power to ensure that learners, teachers and members of the school governing structures are protected and are in a position to play their respective roles in promoting the culture of learning and teaching at our schools.
23. As South Africans, we should refuse to be part of this barbaric, backward thinking of some elements within our body politics and society by undermining other people's rights and freedoms
24. Those of us who believe in our democracy and claim to be defenders of the constitution cannot remain silent when section 16 and 17 of constitution on the bill of rights is violated.
25. Section 16 (1) makes a provision for the freedom of expression, which includes— (a) *freedom of the press and other media; (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.* However in section 16(2), the right in subsection (1) does not extend to— (a) *propaganda for war; (b) incitement of imminent violence; or (c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.*
26. Our constitution in terms of section 17 of Chapter Two on the bill of rights makes provision: “*Everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions*”.

27. Many South Africans continue to enjoy these rights but there are those within various sectors like education, public transport, labour, civil society and political organisations that continue to undermine these rights by engaging in wanton destruction of property, incitement of violence, intimidation and loss of life.
28. Those contravening these rights and freedom cannot be allowed to act with impunity and it's the duty of the law enforcement agencies to take the appropriate action.
29. In pursuit of building a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous nation, we must shun those amongst the community who undermine our efforts through their narrow self-interests. Leaders who incite violence don't deserve to be leaders.
30. As government, we will continue to engage the identified stakeholders in an effort to finding lasting solution to the genuine concerns of the community.
31. We applaud the swift intervention by HE President Zuma who encouraged all parties not to close the door to negotiations hence the stride we have made to stabilise the area though it remains tense
32. The ANC leadership should be commended for quickly coming into the space to fulfil its historic role of being the leader of society.
33. We applaud the efforts of parents and communities who have led from the front by protecting public property and infrastructure- *nawe uliphoyisa*.
34. We are charged with this enormous responsibility of ensuring South Africa is able to achieve its developmental objectives in a safe and secure environment. In our hands we hold the dreams, hopes and aspirations of future generations of this country. We dare not fail them!
35. God bless Africa, her sons and daughters.
36. I THANK YOU!!!