



***MEC Dr. Bandile Masuku Speaking notes on Bank of Lisbon
Commemoration, 05 September 2019, Bank of Lisbon, Johannesburg***

Head of Department, Professor Lukhele

Members of the GDOH Senior Management Services

Families of the deceased firefighters

Representatives of Aurum Institute

Emergency Service Workers

Organised Labour

GDOH Staff

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning,

I would like us to begin by observing a moment of silence for Simphiwe Moropane, Mduduzi Ndlovu and Khathutshelo Muedi.

Today marks a year since the Bank of Lisbon caught fire on the morning of 06th September 2018. My deepest sympathies are extended to the families of all the staff and the firemen that were affected by the fire. It is with indebtedness that we take this opportunity to extend our warm respects to the families of the survivors and the deceased as a result of the burning of the Gauteng Department of Health and Human Settlements Central Offices; but to also be reminded of the brevity of life and the need to always practice kindness and compassion towards one another.

The tragedy of the day exposed the need for us to investigate the state of buildings in Johannesburg, as place of both work and stay. We as a department of health are committed to ensuring that there is adherence to the Occupational Health and Safety Standards in all our facilities. This commitment is anchored on firstly ensuring that all existing facilities are OHS compliant, and secondly that our buildings are underpinned by proper resilient urban management practices which prioritise the greening of our buildings – which in effect refers to buildings that are less hazardous and have increased resilience against both climate change and man-made disasters.

It is also very important to recognise that rapid urbanisation – a result of migration from within the country and outside of our borders has a bearing on the states ability to respond to disaster.

Urban densification is starting to overwhelm the ability to pre-empt and respond to disaster – the loss of the firefighters we are honouring today, came at a time where government was grappling with infrastructure overwhelm, and the demographic challenges that comes with rapid urbanisation. We have been made aware that day zero is now a possibility in Gauteng and Johannesburg in particular, which means that water resources are likely to be depleted.

The fight to keep urban areas safe and liveable depends on brave men and women in emergency services. The death of one emergency services worker is one too many.

We also recognise that the nature of the work we do as a department takes its toll on our staff members. Working in health is a 24-hour job that is requires mental health support. The effects of that fateful day added to the existing strain that the employees of the Bank of Lisbon have faced as

a result of high levels of service demands. At the core of our priorities as the Department is the improvement of staff morale, which includes providing mental health support. We have a long way to go as a Department in dealing with some of the other challenges that exist in our healthcare system.

In the first 99 days in office as the MEC of Health in Gauteng I have had an opportunity to interact with many of the staff members and senior managers at the Central Office and in some of our facilities. One thing that has become even clearer is the responsibility that lies ahead, a responsibility that is not only towards the people of Gauteng alone, but also to the nation.

The coinciding of the anniversary of the burning of the Bank of Lisbon with the completion of the 100 days is significant in that it offers an opportunity to pause and reflect on how the limitations of the past have come at a very high price. It is an opportunity for us to recognise the areas where we have not done well, and to correct ourselves and work in such a way that we are more attentive to detail, not only in terms of the quality of our infrastructure, but also as it relates to nurturing the people who serve the Department and the province with diligence.

Whilst the burning of the Bank of Lisbon destabilised the way that the staff of the department works, through the consequent fragmentation of work, we have also seen the levels of commitment that have been displayed by some of our employees especially at our facilities. Contrary to popular belief, the spirit of selflessness, and a commitment to 'true-humanity' is one that exists in the Department irrespective of the adverse situations that we regularly deal with.

It is true that adversity has the potential to bring about a broader commitment to the community and others. Beginning from the 06th September 2018, this potential has been unleashed and seen in how our employees have made efforts to keep the department afloat and serving the residents of Gauteng. For this I wish to extend my sincerest appreciation on the behalf of the Team Gauteng Health Leadership.

In closing, one cannot over emphasise the great sacrifice and commitment to serving others that has been displayed by the firefighters during the burning of the Bank of Lisbon. Indeed, to serve one's country to the point of death is by far the greatest honour. This is an important reminder of the

necessity to ‘...seek to restore...the great importance we used to give to human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general; to reduce...the materialistic element that is slowly creeping into our society’ (Steve Biko, 1973).

With these words I wish to once again honour the lives of the firefighters who lost their lives in this ordeal. These men have gone beyond their call of duty, they have in their last moment displayed a sense of high regard for service and others. I hope that their level of service and commitment to their work may inspire all of us to serving with diligence and commitment. The onus is upon us to Grow Gauteng Health Together. May we in remembrance of our fallen brothers fight the good fight and ensure that what has happened never be repeated.

I Thank you.