



**Address by Chairperson of the Human Settlements and
Infrastructure Committee, Cllr Mondli Mthembu on the
occasion of the World Council Meeting**

**15 October 2016
Colombia – Bogota**

- Programme Director,
- President and Vice Presidents,
- Secretary-General,
- Fellow Mayors,
- Captains of industry,
- Stakeholders and partners,
- Speakers in different topics,
- Distinguished guests and dignitaries,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- All protocol observed,

Greetings ladies and gentlemen!

On this occasion of the United Cities and Local Governments World Council, thank you for giving the Urban Strategic Planning Committee co-chaired by eThekweni Mayor Zandile Gumede and Mayor Fortunati from Porto Alegre in Brazil.

As local government across the globe, there can be little argument that the democratic rights and values have become increasingly entrenched with the passage of time.

The language and message of democratic local government define critical processes such as law and policy-making; the relationship between citizens and the state; and the relationships among and between citizens and, in many instances, how do these relationships play itself out in space more so public space.

A people-centered public space is a democratic right. However, most communities fail to exercise this right and to access public space. One of the reasons is that this democratic right is not exercised is that communities fail to see public space delivery as a basic service such as water, electricity and roads provision.

However, communities are not the only ones that should be blamed. All levels of government have failed to educate our communities that public space is part of basic service delivery within a City, not just public space but a people-centered public space. So what can we as cities do to ensure this right to public space and city as a whole?

1) We need greater clarity of our role in a people-centered public space.

The quantity and quality of people-centred public space can be guaranteed through proper urban governance mechanisms by developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, by ensuring inclusive and participatory decision making.

Public space requires a legal and policy framework at multi-level government institutions that both enables local authorities to effectively implement national urban policies and empowers them as policy makers.

This is one of the reasons that the Urban Strategic Planning Committee has developed a policy framework to assist local government to develop localised public space policy.

2) Local Government has to reclaim Public Space.

In the absence of or lack of urban governance, public space development has largely been delivered via private sector much to the detriment of democratic rights of the communities within cities.

As local government, we need to assert our mandate as providers of basic services, that provision of Public Space is one of our core functions as democratic local government.

Yes partnering with private sector is an option, but that option should not create pockets of exclusivity but rather be used to create a holistic public space system that can be enjoyed by all.

In cities where private spaces exist, we as local government need to ensure or create a positive relation between public and private space. As cities we need to reclaim this right to provide people centred public space.

3) Public Space and the right to the City as a strategy.

Public space and the right to the city is a strategy where the impact of the strategy is far reaching into the lives of the citizens.

For citizens to exercise their right to the city as well as access to people centred public space, local government would need to ensure that these critical concepts are incorporated into city strategy that is developed with and by the communities.

In developing this strategy, there is a need for a collaborative approach to define the indicators that will monitor the delivery and implementation of people centred public space and improved access to the city and its services.

We have to find ways of engaging all users of public space when we develop our strategy. Failure to engage all user groups will result in the creation of exclusionary public spaces as indicated in the Policy Framework.

4) Public Space as an integrator.

Public space has the ability to act as an integrator of cities and has to be seen as a system that can restructure the city. Cities should deliver equitable levels of services to all citizens including public space.

In many cities, we often find that as one moves away from the city or urban centres, the quality and quantity of people centred public spaces decreases.

In the African context, this is further complicated by the urban rural divide and the ability of cities to provide public spaces in both these environments.

As cities, we need to ensure that we consider the role public space can play as an integrator of communities but also as a power agent of spatial transformation within cities

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, here a few points to consider:

- The Committee for Urban Strategic Planning, urges fellow Mayors, to actively use the Framework for Public Space to develop more localised Public Space Policy for their cities.
- Only through actively working together can on the policy and implementation can we achieve the SDG 11 target for open space.

- Open spaces gives us all an opportunity to redefine our cities, lets grab this opportunity with both hands

Public space is the heartbeat of a city, and its pulse plays a role in energising the city.

With those few words I thank you for your attention. As a collective, we can all actively champion public space to take its rightful place as generator of democratic inclusive cities.

Thank you!