

Migration Makes the World Go Round: Opening Remarks

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On this beautiful Johannesburg morning, where winter is slowly receding and Spring is beginning to encircle the city, it is my singular honour and pleasure to welcome you all to this conference, which is focussed on one of the most important subjects in the world today, namely, the subject of migration. I am particularly honoured to welcome, in our midst, the Chairperson of the National Planning Commission, who is here also as our keynote speaker. I am talking of none other than, Honourable Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Maropene Lydia Ramokgopa.

I also wish to recognise the leaders and representatives from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the SADC secretariat, who have kindly partnered and collaborated with the South African National Planning Commission to make this conference happen. The IOM and the UNDP are arguably two of the most knowledgeable and the resourceful organisations on migration issues in the world. We, in the South African National Planning Commission feel both humbled and privileged to be working with these two organisations. Let me also take the opportunity to welcome all participants from the SADC region and other regions of the continent, especially those from East, West and North Africa.

We could not have gathered at a more opportune time! As we gather here today, the issue of migration has become one of the liveliest issues, nationally, continentally, and globally. This country, South Africa, together with countries such as the UK, is in the storm of current social instability related to issues of migration. Sadly, these include scapegoating and abuse of migrants.

If we once thought that money alone made the world go round, we now realise that, actually, it is and has always been migration that makes the world go round. We are talking here of migration within the borders of one country and between the borders of two or more

countries. If we think deeply and carefully about it, we shall realise that we are all products of the migration of our ancestors.

More importantly, anyone of us can go to bed as citizens one day and wake up as migrants the next day. Like the unruly Johannesburg taxis, which drive around with back windscreen insignia that reads: “This taxi can stop anytime, anywhere,” economic difficulty, instability, conflict, displacement, and war can break out anytime, anywhere and in any country. In this sense, we are all migrants, waiting to happen! There is a sense in which we all live in the diaspora, regardless of whether we live in our native lands or not.

For this reason, migration is not, and should not be seen as a swear word. Migration makes the world go round – for better or worse: for better if viewed and leveraged as a catalyst for development and for worse if abused, misappropriated, and misunderstood.

Before, during, and after the artificially created entities, we call nation-states were created as containers of stitched up nations, there was migration. Migration should therefore not be regarded as an aberration and migrants – forced, voluntary or refugees – must neither be stigmatised nor criminalised.

This conference on migration provides us with an opportunity to engage constructively in an evidence-based and solutions-driven manner, with one of the most crucial conversations in the world today. The theme of this conference – “Migration as a Development Catalyst through Policy Development: Based on Evidence, Diaspora Involvement, and International Collaboration” – was chosen carefully and deliberately.

The theme urges us to consider and to explore the role and potential of migration as a catalyst rather than an inhibitor of development and progress. Similarly, the theme of this conference nudges us away from the world of myths, stigma, superstition, and fearmongering towards an immigration discourse based on evidence, driven by data and planning, guided by the crafting of appropriate policies. Our theme implicitly suggests that migration is a challenge that cannot be met successfully by any single nation, acting on its own. The building of national walls, the demonisation of the other and the introduction of apartheid-type border-control protocols are some of the worst ways of dealing with migration. Only through

regional, continental, and international cooperation can migration be turned into the opportunity that it is and not the threat that it is incorrectly thought to be.

Having already acknowledged the presence of Minister Ramokgopa, please allow me to briefly introduce this daughter of the soil.

Born in Polokwane city and bred in Lebowakgomo, this mother of three holds several qualifications in commercial administration, business management, and municipal finance. She is currently enrolled for a master's in public administration.

Her previous roles include those of, diplomat (having served, amongst others, as SA Consul General in Mumbai India), special advisor to the South African president, ward councillor, mayor, non-executive director of several boards, an accomplished leader of the African National Congress at various levels and offices, including the ANC Women's League. A notable milestone of her political career was her election as the Second Deputy Secretary General of the ANC at the party's 55th Elective Conference in December 2022.

In Minister Maropene Ramokgopa we have a tried and tested leader of immense experience. President Cyril Ramaphosa could not have chosen a more qualified, more skilled, and more talented person to head the most important ministry in his Cabinet, the ministry above all ministries, the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation!

It is my honour and privilege to deputise for Minister Ramokgopa in the South African National Planning Commission.

Please join me in welcoming Honourable Minister Maropene Lydia Ramokgopa to the stage!