

SPEECH AT CAPE TOWN CLUB

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Good evening (INSERT PROTOCOL)

Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. I have been asked to talk to you about how the City of Cape Town hopes to fix social imbalances in our city.

I am sad to admit that Cape Town is one of the most imbalanced cities in South Africa. And as in all South African cities, the imbalance between rich and poor is most easily seen geographically. Driving from Camps Bay to Du Noon can feel like driving between two different planets.

Rich people in Cape Town live in beautiful, orderly suburbs close to their jobs, their children's schools, their shops and their recreation areas.

Most poor people in Cape Town live in depressing dormitory townships or jumbled and squalid informal settlements, far from jobs, economic opportunities, good schools, access to information, or public assets like libraries, museums, art galleries and theatres. Except for those who make the long and expensive journey out into the rich people's world to sell their labour, poor people, particularly the youth, are trapped in a world with no outside stimuli. They are left to stagnate as a society, and to entertain themselves with drugs, sex and violence.

In the end we have not done anything to change our cities from the way the apartheid government designed them. And our apartheid cities are going to stay with us until government acts strongly to make them change. We can't leave this situation to sort itself out. Poor people will stay poor because they are forced to live in a way that makes it extremely difficult to develop themselves.

What do we want Cape Town to look like in fifty years time? Will South Africa still have townships? As our cities and our societies modernise and develop, can we still have huge underdeveloped areas where the majority of our population live separately, without any of the benefits that make cities such powerful economic hubs? We cannot just accept townships as 'the way things are'.

The City of Cape Town aims to begin providing a geographic solution to our geographic problems. Ambitious urban planning and the provision of new forms of housing are the most important solutions we have for addressing social imbalances in our cities.

But it will take a long time, and it will require a serious commitment from all spheres of government. The apartheid government created the divisions in our cities by picking up entire neighbourhoods at one time and dumping them somewhere else. To really undo that, we will have to make plans that are similarly ambitious, but less violently implemented.

We are lucky to have Trevor Manuel as our new Minister in the Presidency for Planning, who earlier this week said that he hopes his new planning commission will be engaging with cities on ambitious urban planning and 'rethinking townships'. However, Minister Manuel has already run into a lot of opposition within his party, which currently refuses to acknowledge urbanisation as the irreversible reality that it is, and insists on prioritising rural areas for development that can never be sustainable. The result is that there are no real plans to deal with the continually rising levels of rural people migrating to our cities.

But in the meantime, the City of Cape Town will begin trying to do things differently. In the short term, this is going to mean experimenting with high density low income housing linked to new developments such as our IRT transport system.

The City of Cape Town does not have a lot of room to manoeuvre in. We have to provide land for new housing developments, and unless there is some big change, we do not have a lot of land to go round. The key issue in providing housing to those in need is well located land, which refers to land in close proximity to public transport routes, activity routes and corridors where a range of amenities and conveniences are available.

The City has to maximise the use of very limited land that is available in good locations for building new homes. Higher densities provide significant saving in land cost per unit, as less land is needed and shorter infrastructure runs cost less installation and operation fees per consumer. What this means is that well planned higher density residential buildings are not only essential for changing how poor people live in Cape Town, but they are the most viable option to effectively and efficiently solve the housing challenge in Cape Town.

Good planning is also about co-ordinating different aspects of what you are doing so that work together to create maximum value. In order to make full use of our ambitious new public transport system, we need to have large numbers of people living close to where public transport is available. If public transport can be as simple and functional to use as cars are, then we can erase the huge advantage car owners have over people without cars.

Experience and best practise suggest that for affordable housing developments a maximum of three to four storeys is appropriate and sustainable. This is the height that the City of Cape Town is pursuing for the proposed Community Residential Unit developments.

In acknowledging the housing challenge, the City is seeking more active involvement with informal communities and settlements, and active engagement will be the cornerstone of our efforts to stabilise the housing crisis and increase density.

I hope that we can be an example of what can be done in municipalities around South Africa, and we look forward to working closely with National Government and all interested stakeholders in the future. Let us all start to do things differently. Let us begin rethinking our cities.

Thank you.