

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY HELEN ZILLE
ON ELECTION AS PREMIER OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE, WALE STREET, CAPE TOWN, 6 MAY 2009.

Speaker
Honourable members
Justice Dennis Davis
Family, friends and colleagues

With humility, I accept the office of Premier entrusted to me by the honourable members of this house, on the mandate of the electorate.

As a team we accept the responsibilities assigned to us. We shall try to discharge our duties with humility and dedication. Over the next five years we will work hard to earn the trust that has been placed in us.

This is a great responsibility and I am committed, in the execution of my duties, to earn the confidence you have placed in me.

We are looking forward to our term of office. I am privileged to be part of a motivated and task-orientated team.

I draw strength from knowing that in the term ahead, I will be serving as part of a committed team.

We have a mandate from the citizens of the Western Cape to work towards achieving our vision of an open, opportunity society for all.

In order to fulfil this mandate we rely on the officials of this provincial administration.

Many staff, in particular those who work at the coalface of delivery such as the nurses, doctors, teachers, police officers and others, work under extremely difficult conditions, with capacity constraints, high vacancy rates and inadequate budgets.

The dedicated public servants among them are South Africa's real heroes. We will listen to them and learn from them as we apply the policies for which we now have a public mandate. During my years in executive office, I have learnt that appointing the right people in the right positions is the most important determinant of good governance. We will be applying the "fitness for purpose" philosophy in this administration.

We value and respect the dedicated and competent professionals who already serve as staff members in the province.

Our administration will welcome those committed to effective and efficient delivery and those who understand the distinction between the party and the state.

We shall also respect the principle of cooperative governance, as contained in the Constitution, and also expect mutual respect in our relations with national and local government spheres.

Each sphere of government in the Western Cape has specifically assigned competences and each has a role to play in the development of our democracy.

Our oversight role in various spheres will be fulfilled in the spirit of cooperation and support.

We will govern for all the people of the Western Cape in all our rich diversity. We will be a government for all the people.

The electorate of the Western Cape has taken a great stride for the advancement of democracy in South Africa. They clearly understand the power that lies in their right to vote and we know well that they understand this.

When I deliver the State of the Province Address, I will set out in some detail the challenges we face and what we must do to surmount them. Today, in this brief acceptance speech, I want to talk about the key values that will underpin this administration.

In politics, values are either assumed or considered irrelevant to the world of *realpolitik* – which is why they often go missing in action.

As a tightly-knit team your new Provincial Government will make a point of doing things differently.

We have agreed that our term of office over the next five years will be informed by two core values.

Firstly, a dedication to establishing and telling the truth in each situation we face.

Secondly, a commitment to defining, accepting and meeting our responsibilities.

If we live by these values, they will have profound practical consequences because they are the bedrock of the open, opportunity society for all.

A commitment to the truth requires open, accountable, and transparent government. This is also the best way to counter corruption, which has become a cancer in our society.

As Judge Louis Brandeis, a US Supreme Court justice of the early 20th century, famously noted: sunlight is the best disinfectant. And so, we will devise ways of letting the sun shine into our administration, and of making accurate information on our activities more easily accessible to citizens, not only so that we are held more accountable, but so that we can jointly address the obstacles that stifle development and retard progress.

We are human and we will fall short on occasion – but we will at all times defend the independence of institutions that exist to call us to account and to curb power abuse. This includes the media and our political opposition, led by my colleague and former Premier of the Western Cape, Lynne Brown.

When we define our responsibilities, our starting point is the Constitution, the compact we as South Africans made with one another as we emerged from the long, dark night of apartheid, and recognised that we are indeed one nation with one future.

According to our Constitution, the state's greatest responsibility lies in respecting, protecting, expanding and realising the rights enshrined in our Bill of Human Rights. This administration will strive with dedication to meet this ideal with the resources at our disposal.

If the state does its job, it means that citizens are increasingly free to create and to use the opportunities they need to follow their dreams and become the best they can be.

This is how development happens. But it is not an automatic or inevitable process.

A society only progresses to the extent that growing numbers of citizens claim their rights in order to fulfil their responsibilities.

Our Constitution is underpinned by the recognition that progress is the product of disciplined work in a free society.

In fact, chapter one of the Constitution makes this central point even before it gets to the Bill of Rights, when it says (in clause 3):

There is a common South African citizenship.

All citizens are:

Equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship; and
Equally subject to the duties, and responsibilities of citizenship.

Importantly and understandably, after centuries of oppression, as a society we have given special emphasis to the first.

This administration believes the time has come to start giving additional traction to the second injunction as well.

During my time in government, I have come to understand that South Africa cannot become a rights-based society unless a critical mass of citizens also fulfils the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

We all recognize the fact that a government which neglects its responsibilities undermines its citizens' rights.

It is equally true that citizens who shirk their responsibilities and duties undermine the rights of others, as well as their own.

Rights and responsibilities are indivisible and mutually reinforcing, for better and for worse.

There are countless practical examples.

The obvious one is the greatest health challenge of our time: the pandemic of HIV/AIDS.

Ordinary citizens of South Africa, many infected with the HI virus, played a key and courageous role over the past 15 years in confronting government denialism and forcing the state to accept its responsibility in education, prevention and treatment.

Today this is being done, with varying degrees of efficacy, throughout the country. In some parts of the country, I was interested to learn, we distribute more condoms in relation to population, than anywhere else on earth.

But no government can enforce and impose behaviour changes on free individuals.

For all the good the treatment movement is doing, and it is very substantial, it is essential now to place equal emphasis on individual responsibility in fighting this pandemic.

We undermine the letter and spirit of our Constitution if we assume that the state must always shoulder the responsibilities of citizens who refuse to accept theirs.

Yes, we believe that treatment is a right. But we must not be fooled into believing it is free.

For every cent we spend on treating a preventable condition, other priorities (such as the needs of disabled children, for example) are short-changed.

Personal responsibility is all the more important because our challenges are so great and our resources so limited.

This is graphically illustrated by yet another example, drawn from my recent experience as mayor of Cape Town. Out of every R3 the City spends on installing services in informal settlements, R2 is spent on repairs to vandalised infrastructure. If a government spends more than half the allocated capital budget fixing things that should not have been broken, fewer than half the number of people get the services that should have been their right, had others fulfilled their constitutional duty of responsible citizenship.

Perhaps the most serious inhibitors of opportunity and rights in our province are drug abuse and teenage pregnancy – in fact the two often go hand in hand. The police estimate that up to 80% of crime in this province is linked to substance abuse – as are the majority of fatal accidents.

And children who have children inhibit their own rights and opportunities, as well as those of their babies, with lasting social consequences.

While the state has a crucial role in changing the circumstances that give rise to these social ills, breaking the cycle is a responsibility we share with citizens who understand that personal discipline is essential if we are to enjoy the fruits of freedom.

No sphere of government, nor any province, can compensate for the failure of any other to meet its constitutional obligations. And the more some fail to fulfil their responsibilities, the more burden and blame is heaped on those who do.

All of this is very old-fashioned stuff, not to mention politically incorrect, but we happen to believe it is true, which is why we will not hesitate to say so.

We will not turn our backs on these core values when it is met with public criticism. In fact, we shall just go on to promote these values.

Because, in the end, we have confidence in South Africans. As a people, we respect the truth. We understand that values are the bedrock on which we build our lives as individuals and as communities.

As we assume our responsibilities as the governing party of the Western Cape, please allow me a moment to thank those who have supported our endeavours, which started decades ago. The teams in the Leader's office and Mayor's office – kept strictly separate to respect the distinction between the Party and the State – have done all the work for which I have taken too much of the credit. No-one could have asked for better guidance or support, advice, steadfastness, integrity and commitment. Thank you all very much.

And as I face my life's greatest public challenge and responsibility, please allow me to acknowledge the people who have shaped me, none more so than my mother, Mila, from whom I absorbed the values I spoke of today, even before I could walk or talk; my husband, Johann, who has been a living example of these values to me every day for the past 26 years; my beloved siblings, Carla and Paul; my beloved sons, Paul and Thomas; and my friend and housekeeper, Grace, and her son, Chulumanco. You are my nearest and dearest. Your love and support have succoured me through the storms of life.

Thank you for being here to support me in taking this oath of office today. I will work without ceasing to live up to it.

I end with the words that are usually used to begin sessions of this Legislature as we acknowledge the grace and guidance of the one God.

Bless our country and its people; establish justice in our province.
God bless Africa
Keep its children.
Guide its leaders.
Let there be peace in Africa.

May the Almighty bless us and maintain us for the great task that awaits us.

Thank you very much.

MEDIA LIAISON: ROBERT MACDONALD 084-977-9888