Halala, Ekurhuleni, Halala!

Fellow Democrats, residents of Ekurhuleni,

My name is Refiloe Nt’sekhe.

Let me please introduce you to the DA’s Refiloe Nt’sekhe. I am the currently party’s 1st Deputy Federal Chairperson. In Gauteng, I serve as the Democratic Alliance Shadow MEC for Social Development in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

In Ekurhuleni, The Democratic Alliance has bestowed the honour of selecting me to lead the party’s into victory as the City of Ekurhuleni as their Mayoral candidate. I role I feel truly humbled to take on.

2011, I was asked to serve and lost the Mayoral candidacy to a far more deserving colleague. 2016, I was again asked to serve but declined.

This time, when those who have watched me grow within the ranks of the Democratic Alliance and those who believed asked me to serve, I felt ready and I put my name in the hat.

After submitting a tough pre-interview written assignment and going through a gruelling and highly intimidating interview, I today stand before you, as I have always done, committed ready to serve and to bring about real change.

I am ready “to get things done” for the people of Ekurhuleni.

Ekurhuleni is not Johannesburg East as people like to commonly called. It is a Metro Municipality just like Johannesburg and Tshwane: this for me the Primary failure of a Marketing Department of this City to position it against its sister metros.

Residents of this municipality have been short-changed with service delivery by those who currently hide in the corridors of power - far from the plight of ordinary citizens.

Ekurhuleni is the epitome of lack of political will to get things done. It has become the epicentre of service delivery collapse and failure. It is the riddled with green and gold standard of cadre deployment, corruption, financial waste and mismanagement.

Since hitting the campaign trail a little under a month ago, I have travelled to all 3 corners of this metro Ekurhuleni – from Tsakane in the Far East to Katlehong in the South from Springs to Mid-Stream in the North. During my travels, I have been meeting residents – listening to their frustrations, their disappointments and witnessing first-hand the decay of this once economic powerhouse.

But none of this shocks me.

Like you, I am a resident of Ekurhuleni – this City is my home, and just like you, these are my lived experiences.

When your lights are off, mine too are off. When you do not have water, neither do I.

Yet, despite all the rot, there is hope. There is a solution.

As the Mayor of this municipality, I will not be alone. I will be backed by the party who runs the best municipalities in the country and the best Municipality in Gauteng.

You don’t need to take my word for it - these are the findings of the Auditor General, Municipal IQ and numerous other institutions who monitor municipal performance.

One only need take a trip to our neighbours in Midvaal to see what excellence in Gauteng looks like. Rated the best performing municipality in the Province, my vision for Ekurhuleni is to not only build on their

success but to make this Metro a centre of excellence.

Let me briefly unpack some of the ways the landscape of Ekurhuleni will be reconfigured to work for you under a DA-led government:

Electricity: Daily there are well over 1000 power outages in the municipality. Some of these outages have been known to last up to 6 days. How are residents, industry and the economy to survive when the power grid is unstable?

Simply, they can’t.

Some residents of Katlehong have been without electricity for the last 5 months. Household for paying residents with electric appliances such  fridge, washing machine, microwave, stove have now been reduced to cooking with a prima stove.

Wadeville, which is a key industrial in the Metro, has in this financial year alone been hit with a cumulative 65 hours without electricity. Sometimes when power is out, the damages to equipment costs millions and to replace takes 10 to 15 days: staff salaries still to be paid at the end of the month yet, there was no productivity and market supply was not met. This is how those who were green, and gold are destroying jobs.

The electricity department has 1100 funded positions but only has 879. NERSA has recommended 1500. As a start when I become the Mayor, I will personally see to it that the funded positions are filled by skilled engineers and technicians who are crucial to keeping the lights on.

I will also prioritise stock control management to ensure that there are always parts in stores so that when there is a need for components to be replaced, they are readily available to get the lights back on.

Most importantly, my long-term vision is to free Ekurhuleni from the shackles of Eskom.

To do this, I will learn from DA sister governments: take advantage of the Promulgated Act 10 like Stellenbosch is doing to start building a base of Independent Power Producers. Look at another sister City like Stellenbosch and incentivise businesses to fit roof-top solar panels on their properties to feedback into the power gird. This will start with all municipal owned buildings so that residents and business can keep the lights on.

Budget: The current administration views this as a box ticking exercise, yet there is little to account for how money is spent in this municipality.

I visited a newly built taxi-rank in Duduza where taxi owners, drivers and commuters complained about the lack of public participation in the decision to build this rank. The location is not ideal as it completely misses the busy transport routes used by commuters. What should have been a prudent investment of public funds is now a white elephant.

I have visited white elephant housing projects in Vosloorus where the need for dignified housing outstrips demand, yet the Metro has surrendered R250 million back to national Treasury because it was simply not spent.

In 2011, when I was a councillor, residents of Ekurhuleni were promised that the 119 Informal settlements would be eradicated. Today, there are over 125 informal settlements in Ekurhuleni. The R250 million should have been spend on houses as well as also providing people with serviced stands.

It is no secret that the valuation of properties in the Metro is in a shambles. Residents have effectively been billed out of their houses. Like you, my property rates are diabolically high and in no way reflect the true market value of my home.

Like you – the rates that we pay are supposed to fund services. But like you, I do not receive these services.

Many government contracts issued in this metro are questionable- with the first question being whether the appointed tenderer even has a service level agreement and whether they are held accountable to meeting it.

This is not governance. This is not accountability. This is not how residents should be treated by those who were elected to lead.

The corner stone of good governance is having a firm grip on the issues that impact residents – their needs, hopes and dreams.

Good governance is “go and see for yourself how money is being used!”

It is about fostering an environment conducive to economic growth to get our people working and eradicating unemployment.

It is about providing residents with services that will ensure their dignity.

It is about harnessing our budget to improve our socio-economic conditions.

It is about keeping our people safe from crime.

As I stand here today, my promise to you - the residents of Ekurhuleni, is that under my leadership – with my skills and Democratic Alliance’s record of good governance, Ekurhuleni will be a city where every single resident is brought into the fold.

No one will be left behind.

Like a surgeon removing a deadly tumour, I intend to remove the rot and restore my patient back to full strength.

My commitment is to you, the residents of Ekurhuleni.

I am here for you. I am in your corner. I am your champion because I am one of you.

I dedicate myself, as your humble servant, to improving your lives.

For far too long have we suffered incompetence to our detriment.

The time has come for us to say “no more!”.

Together, we will overcome and set our municipality on the road to prosperity.

Soon, I will be unpacking my manifesto for Ekurhuleni but I want you to have a taste of what’s coming.

Jobs are essential to giving people dignity. One of my visits as I travelled through this metro was the Jewellery Precinct in Bonaero Park behind OR Tambo airport that is now incorrectly being used as a food

processing plant.

In April 2021, India exported manufactured jewellery worth $3.37 billion. It is high time Ekurhuleni returned this precinct into a Jewellery Manufacturing plant so that we too can have a slice of the billion-dollar pie: these are the jobs that we need to create to reduce the high unemployment in this metro.

No business will want to establish a business in a municipality where there is power outages, water outages, pothole ridden roads, poor waste collection, incorrect billing, incorrect valuations and other poor service delivery.

My priority is to fix these, then attract business whilst fostering an environment for the creation of businesses within Ekurhuleni. This will create the jobs that our people so desperately need.

I thank you.

Halala Ekurhuleni Halala