Democratic Alliance speech by

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Gauteng residents continue to suffer as municipalities’ regress

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Madam Speaker,

Terrence Makhubo from Ratanda Extension 23 in Lesedi Local Municipality says that their municipality is failing to deliver essential services such as water and the maintenance of road infrastructure. According to Makhubo, there are potholes in Blackwood Street that have not been fixed for some time and have resulted in the local taxis not using the road. This is having a huge impact on the residents residing next to and along Blackwood Street; when they go shopping, instead of the taxi dropping them in the street next to their houses, they have to be dropped off in another street and must walk about a kilometre while carrying heavy groceries.

Most residents in the area do not own vehicles, but even if they did, their vehicles would be damaged by the potholes. This is making our people’s lives difficult and now they must suffer because the municipality is failing to deliver on its mandate. Makhubo states that they have been complaining to the municipality and they have been told that there is not sufficient budget to attend to all the service delivery issues across the municipality.

Lesedi Local Municipality is one of many municipalities that have presented an unfunded budget which is putting a severe strain on the delivery of basic services. Where is COGTA in this situation to assist this municipality that is struggling? Lesedi can be saved from this crisis if COGTA is serious about helping and supporting municipalities before they resemble Emfuleni Local Municipality.

Gauteng residents will continue to suffer a lack of access to adequate basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation as long as the Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) is still under this current administration which does not care about the plight of our people.

This department is failing to deliver on its core mandate to ensure that our municipalities are properly functioning and to provide much-needed support to the municipalities that have collapsed and those that are on a brink of collapsing such as Lesedi.

It is so sad that our residents such as Makhubo are bearing the brunt of the lack of service delivery while the COGTA political head, MEC Lebogang Maile and the Head of the Department are not worried and do not to care.

Madam Speaker, the living conditions that the residents of Ratanda continue to be exposed to are similar to or even worse in other municipalities such as Merafong, Rand West and Emfuleni.

The Auditor-General has highlighted in his report that the state of Gauteng municipalities is not getting better but are getting worse. l will tell you the reason why our municipalities are getting worse and not improving. This is because COGTA is failing on its core mandate to support municipalities by ensuring good governance, financial accountability, capacity building and institutional stability. MEC Maile as the accounting officer and the custodian of this department is missing in action and inspires no confidence in his work.

This department lacks the political will to lead this ship in the right direction as MEC Maile is arrogant and does not listen to any advice and recommendations either from the Auditor-General or the COGTA Portfolio Committee.

The Auditor-General also highlighted an escalating trend in unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure (UIFW) in municipalities over recent years, which is evident in audit opinions and summarised in the annual general reports of local government. There has also been a sense of uncertainty amongst municipalities on the understanding of how irregular expenditure should be treated and who has the legislative power to deal with irregular expenditure. This is where MEC Maile and his department must come in and assist our municipalities in understanding irregular expenditure and how to use municipal coffers. The same Maile seems distracted and is instead focusing on his political party duties thereby neglecting his executive duties; his department is being strung along with him hence service delivery is suffering.

Madam Speaker, going back to the service delivery challenges highlighted by Makhubo residing in Ratanda Extension 23, which are the lack of maintenance of road infrastructure and shortage of water.

Firstly, let me start by focusing on the lack of maintenance of road infrastructure. Lesedi Local municipality does not have sufficient budget to attend to service delivery issues, and l will tell you why. It is because the Gauteng Provincial Government Departments owe Lesedi Local Municipality R16 246 996.50. This money is enough to fix potholes in Blackwood Street and ensure that the residents have access to the road and can take a taxi from their street. This will ease the burden on residents as they will no longer have to travel more than a kilometre to catch a taxi or to walk home carrying their groceries.

Gauteng Government Departments owe R449 651 120.06 to the municipalities for utilities as of the end of February 2022. This money owed to municipalities could help to ease their financial pressure.

This department must assist the municipalities in ensuring that the Gauteng government departments own up to their responsibility of paying their utility bills. It is the municipalities who are left stranded and unable to pay off the debt owed to Rand Water, Eskom and fix and maintain dilapidated municipal infrastructure hence residents such as Makhubo must bear the consequences of this department’s incompetency.

Secondly, Makhubo stated that there is a shortage of water in Ratanda Extension 23 and the residents have been without water for some time. The water issue has been the biggest challenge across the province and will continue if not attended to. The DA has been raising concerns with regards to numerous occasions where our residents were abruptly left without water due to the maintenance of water infrastructure by Rand Water. In most instances, Rand Water would not have communicated timeously to the residents of Gauteng through their municipalities about the planned water outages.

The DA has taken proactive measures to ensure that there are improved communication lines between Rand Water and municipalities across the province. We have met with the Rand Water CEO and had a fruitful engagement. However, there is still more that needs to be done by our municipalities in terms of educating its residents about water preservation and conservation.

The major challenge remaining is that our municipalities do not have sufficient water tankers to provide water to the affected residents during water outages caused by Rand Water. This is where this department must come in to assist municipalities in ensuring that they provide water to their residents during water outages. The DA has also proposed a solution to this problem by demanding that the Premier and MEC Maile lobby their national counterparts to engage with the South African National Defence Force to assist with water tankers during the water outages. DA's proposed solution has been ignored; however, this solution would have ensured that Makhubo would continue to have access to water during water infrastructure upgrades in Ratanda Extension 23.

Madam Speaker, this department consistently underspends on its allocated budget and the money is returned to Treasury while our municipalities such as Lesedi, Emfuleni, Rand West and Merafong are in a financial crisis. If this department is serious about ensuring that our municipalities function properly, it must improve on its expenditure.

There is no hope that this budget will assist Makhubo and other residents across the province to access adequate service delivery, therefore the DA will not be supporting this budget.

**Media Enquiries**

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