

Introductory comments by His Worship the Metropolitan Mayor of Durban

Councillor Obed Mlaba

at the Local Government Workshop 14 October 1999.

The strength of any democracy is by and large measured by the government. It is the form of governance closest to the people. It is far easier for the citizenry to identify with their ward Councillor, who lives in their neighbourhood and who may be in a position to deliver on a more meaningful basis, than their parliamentary representatives. It is also far more important that the face of local government is seen to be ethical, committed to delivery and in touch with the aspirations of the people.

It has been argued that the reason for the weak democracies in much of the African continent is the weak systems of local government in these countries. But strong local government derives as much from prudent financial decisions in line with accepted priorities as it does from a hostile stance on corruption.

It would, in the South African context, be extraordinarily sad if our government of the people were to be perceived as being corrupt. That we have become transparent, accessible and committed to eradicating any hint of corruption is beyond doubt. If this has led to a perception that the present government is more corrupt than it is totally wrong. What we have relentlessly served to do is to expose the corrupt and bring them to justice.

Sometimes, however, there is a fine line between what is ethical and what is not. An ethical approach to local government is usually built over a period of time and becomes institutionalised. Let us entrench such practice so that a culture of ethical conduct becomes the order of the day.

9th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC), 10-15 October, 1999, Durban, South Africa

How we do this is what I look forward to hearing today.