

**SPEECH BY Ms DIPUO PETERS, MP, MINISTER OF ENERGY, AT
THE SWITCH-ON FUNCTION: TSOLO JUNCTION, MHLONTLO
MUNICIPALITY, 17 OCTOBER 2009**

Programme Director

The Mayor and councilors of Mhlontlo Municipality

The people of Mhlontlo

MECs here present

Traditional Leaders

Bhotani Mawethu!

We are gathered here at the Tsolo Junction, for the first time, in this area of the OR Tambo district, barely six months since the people of this area and this region boldly reaffirmed their overwhelming confidence in their own movement, the African National Congress.

Our presence, therefore, today, more than anything else, re-emphasizes the importance that your government, the ANC

government, attaches to the people of Mhlontlo and our desire to make a meaningful contribution to improving your material conditions for the better.

You will recall that, in our manifesto and in all the campaigns that we undertook before the elections we were very clear that rural development is going to be one of our key areas of focus during the term of the current government led by our President, Mr Jacob Zuma. The President, in his wisdom, even established a stand alone department of rural development. We have done all these things because it cannot be correct that the people who experience development are only those who are located in the so called metropolitan areas.

We cannot allow that to continue. We are here to stop it. This government, that I am privileged to be part of, will pay even more attention to doing everything in its power to eradicate all vestiges of apartheid including, but not limited to, eliminating the snail pace with which we have been moving with regard to the changes that we have to implement in areas such as Qumbu and Tsolo.

Only those who are willfully blind will forget that these areas were very much at the centre piece of the struggle against apartheid. It was in these areas that leaders of the ANC and our alliance partners gamboled and frolicked as they joined the masses of our people in prosecuting the struggle against, what might, to outsiders, look like trivial issues such as stock theft, internecine violence that rocked this part of the world in the period after the 1994 elections.

All these anomalies happened under the cover of darkness. There were no lights when women and children were mowed down in their sleep. When the cruel and callous bands of faceless people caused havoc in this area.

We are here finally to bring lights to these communities who have been patient since 1994. You did not do what has become fashionable these days that in order to be heard you had to embark upon acts of wanton destruction of property. This ceremony will serve, more than anything else, to restore the dignity of our people who have been victims of centuries of repression, colonialism as well as institutional racism.

With this switch-on ceremony, we are making a statement to the people of Tsolo and Qumbu that your government cares about you. It was Bethold Brecht, in his famous essay, *The Soldiers of the Revolution*, who remarked that, “when the battle of the mountains has been won, (you) will (then) see the emergence of the battle of the plains.” We are now here finally to remove the final vestiges of the battle of the plains after the mountainous battle of apartheid has been won.

I am very pleased that we are here to switch-on two electrification projects in the area of Mhlontlo: in Qumbu and Tsolo. This municipality is one of the municipalities that I made a commitment about in my budget vote speech. I indicated then that my department will be investing a lot more financial resources for the benefit of the people of this area and the eventual realization of the faster service delivery imperatives of government. I am here today, in this inclement weather, six months later, finally to celebrate this achievement of the people of this area.

As government we know that the biggest casualties of this lack of access to electricity are women, children, people with

disabilities and the pensioners. Women, in particular, are the ones who:

- ✓ Have to travel long distances on foot, to fetch wood and water, with children on their back.
- ✓ Whose children have to study under the darkness of a candle light or even paraffin which has caused devastation.
- ✓ Whose children are unable to be exposed to the vagaries of technology related subjects, because, again, their schools do not have access to electricity?

The projects that we are launching today have a total combined value of R42 million. This covers just over 6 000 connections in these two villages. We are investing over R87 million in the Mhlontlo Municipality alone during this financial year: both in our municipal as well as Eskom allocation.

Mhlontlo is one of the municipalities that do not have an electricity distribution license, however, we have taken a deliberate decision directly to fund the municipality in order to

enable them to work with us to fast track the electrification of this area.

You have no one else to thank but your municipal leaders who came knocking at our doors. This demonstrated their commitment to service delivery. We are here to celebrate with them for the manner in which they were so inimitable. We just could not get them off our proverbial back. They were determined, persistent and persuasive

I have no doubt that with caliber of leaders you have Mhlontlo's electrification backlog will indeed be eradicated within the targets that we have set for ourselves.

I am pleased to report that there is currently no bulk capacity challenge in this area. However, the cost of connecting electricity is high because the area is located in a geography which is deep and remote which compelled us to build longer and more expensive connecting lines.

The days of criminals attacking and raping our elderly and vulnerable at night, because there is no electricity will now be a thing of the past.

This project, has also spoken to the job creation imperatives contained in our manifesto; not only did it bring lights to our homes, but it also brought food on the table.

This should have come as a relief during this difficult period of global economic turmoil. I am therefore making bold to say that these massive projects can only serve their true value if they provide employment opportunities to the most deserving local people and not a coterie of friends and families of those who are politically connected.

The President has established a Presidential Hotline so that you can report the people who are conducting themselves in an unbecoming and corrupt manner when they are supposed to deliver a decent service to our people.

I have also appointed Public Liaison officers in my department. In addition to these officials relating to the Presidential Hotline,

they will also receive complains from the public about energy matters. So I would like to urge you to report any unbecoming behaviour in relation to these massive electrification projects. This will give us the opportunity to resolve simmering problems before they escalate beyond the boiling point.

The same applies to those who are stealing electricity *izinyoka* who are illegally stealing electricity. These people are doing something that deprives local government and Eskom of the revenue they need to build infrastructure for those who are yet to receive electricity. We must all remember the adage that says, “We have not inherited the planet from our forefathers, but (rather) we have borrowed it from our children.”

In fact, *izinyoka* are denying government and Eskom of the revenue to realize our stated objective of achieving universal access in all proclaimed areas by 2014.

You will recall that in January 2008, we experienced load shedding in our country. The strength of our economic growth had caused our demand to outstrip the supply. Our big industrial customers were consuming a lot of electricity. They were joined in

this by residential customers who did not worry about their consumption patterns especially those who were not paying their electricity bills.

Others did not even mind leaving their appliances active almost all the time. They did this because of the relatively cheaper electricity prices that had become the norm in our country. I am sad to inform you, and the rest of the country, that we are not out of the woods yet. We are still thin on the ground with regard to the reserve margin we need to keep our electricity grid intact.

That is the reason I am urging you to take part in the Nersa process when it reaches these shores so that you can make your voice heard on the issue of the tariff application that Eskom has submitted to Nersa.

Municipal buildings, such as Mhlontlo building, have to unequivocally embrace energy efficiency practices. We are therefore urging you, as you join other South Africans who have access to electricity, to embrace energy efficiency. As the SABC advert says: **it is the right thing to do.**

Let us explore all other forms of energy sources such as renewable energy including reliable solar energy, so that even more communities can have access to electricity as we used to say in the struggle: **in their lifetime.**

I am therefore urging you to look after this investment. Let us keep it for posterity. This means that those who are using electricity must therefore pay for it. There is nothing for Mahala (i.e. for free). We have an opportunity here to prevent those amongst us who will therefore be tempted to use this opportunity to bridge or bypass the meters. They sometimes even do it for other people. When they come to you to do these wrong things, chase them away. Report them to the police so that they can be stopped in their tracks.

On our side, as the policy department, we have instructed Nersa to ensure that it does what it ought to have done a long time ago, namely to implement measures that are provided for in our legislation and policies with regard to shielding poor communities from these high tariffs particularly those who are using 20 Amp circuit breakers. These are the people who use less than 88 Kwh per month worth of electricity.

We are also talking to our colleagues in the treasury about the quantum and the costs associated with our desire to increase the Free Basic Electricity provision of electricity beyond the current 50 Kwh level.

We have also asked Nersa to ensure that the inclining tariff structure is introduced as a matter of urgency such that it becomes active when municipalities implement new tariffs in July next year.

We have an historic opportunity to reverse the vestiges of apartheid and what we doing today is but a single step in a journey which should take us to achieve universal access in all formal households by 2014.

Working together we can do more!

Long Live the People of Mhlontlo!

Ndiyabulela. Enkosi!

