We gather today during a very monumental, but sometimes overlooked period in South Africa, as we commemorate and celebrate Human Rights Day.

As we mark the day, remembering the sacrifices and hardships those who came before us had to make and experience in order to guarantee the South Africa we live in today, may we also use the time to consider what responsibilities come with these rights, and our role in exercising our human rights, while also respecting and upholding the rights of others.

May we remember and honour the bravery of the likes of Robert Sobukwe, the PAC and the community of Sharpeville, who on the 21st of March 1960, who not only spoke out against the injustices and inhumane treatment black people were exposed to, but dared to do something about it.

Unfortunately- unlike you and I who today, get to enjoy the right to peacefully assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions- they however, did not get to enjoy such a privilege and as a result 69 people lost their lives in the battle for you and I to have merely but the most basic of human rights.
While many say South Africa has one of the most sophisticated Bill of Rights, reflective of a free and just society, we cannot be oblivious to the fact that many in our communities are yet to experience a South Africa that equally serves the rights of all those who live in it, and for this I take part of the blame on behalf of our municipality.

It is our collective responsibility as the different pillars of government to ask ourselves the tough questions from time to time – and often around this time of the year I always question myself on whether we as government are doing enough to safeguard and protect the rights of our communities, and often the answer is often - not so much.

While progress has been made in leaps and bounds, there remains a lot that can be done to promote and safeguard the rights of our people and the most important first step to ensuring this is by being cognisant of our actions and decisions as individuals and how these influence another person’s basic rights or their ability to exercise their rights.

Nelson Mandela once said, “to deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.” In essence what the late President is alluding to is that denying someone the right to exercise their basic rights is in essence refusing to acknowledge their humanity, or regarding them as less human than you, and therefore less deserving of the very basic of human privileges.

Speaker, I will use a very recent incident which I believe that we as a municipality should take as a lesson on humanity and why the rights of some should not and can never supersede those of others.

On Sunday, Midvaal was in the news for all but the right reasons this time around.

As many of us are aware of the news article in the Sunday Independent this past weekend, which has accused one of us of allegedly enabling injustice and segregation to take place within our municipality for their personal gain.

I firstly want to condemn this in the strongest terms and reaffirm that what has allegedly taken place is not a reflection of our values as a municipality as well as the efforts we have been making to ensure that the needs and interests of all those who live in Midvaal are upheld and protected.

Fellow Councillors,

I have written to Speaker Freddie Peters, as the legislated custodian of the Junior Council, and requested that he provide clarity on all issues indicated in the article, and have already received feedback from the Speaker on the matter.

I am now studying his response, as well as that of everyone else involved in this matter and will provide feedback on what further action will be taken.

What I can guarantee you at this stage, is that this matter will be properly dealt with and rectified in a manner that serves the interests of our community.
Speaker,

This week has also seen a human rights victory for the vulnerable in our communities.

On Monday, Retired Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke delivered his judgment following the lengthy and gut-wrenching Life Esidimeni Arbitration hearings, vindicating many families and civil rights group who for several months pleaded with the Gauteng Health Department not to go ahead with their plans to move thousands of mentally ill patients from Life Healthcare group facilities to ill-equipped and illegal NGO’s.

A decision we now know has led to the deaths of more than 144 – and possibly more – people.

We welcome the Retired Justice’s report into Life Esidimeni and applaud him on the manner in which he carried out the hearings and the dignity and respect with which he handled the memory of the deceased and their families.

We believe that while R1,2million can never be consolation for a life lost, it however serves as a vindication that what happened should not have happened, and that the decision by the Gauteng Health Department, under the leadership of Qedani Mahlangu was irrational, inhumane and criminal.

We now hope that the police and the National Prosecuting Authority will bring the matter to completion and ensure justice for the families of the victims and survivors of the Life Esidimeni tragedy, by bringing those responsible to account – and hopefully provide answers to the many questions that the families and South Africans are still asking themselves.

Speaker,

We have noted that while we have duly engaged with our communities regarding the new General Valuation Roll which comes into effect on the 1st of July 2018, many have still raised grievances and confusion regarding the legislation.

We continue to urge property owners who feel that the Municipal Valuation is overstated or that have any other grievances related to this matter to lodge an objection before the closing date to ensure their grievances are duly addressed before the new roll comes into effect.

The roll remains open for inspection until the 30th of April 2018 and appeal to our residents to make use of the necessary avenues to raise their objections before the deadline.

Before you today are three very important items for the growth and sustainability of the municipality viz the draft Integrated Development Plan, Draft Budget and the Single Land Use Scheme which will be available for public comment and participation before being finalised.

Of key importance to note in these documents is that:
• The Capital Investment Framework, as contained in the Midvaal SDF has been updated.

• Councillors will receive training regarding their role in terms of the new Act and familiarising them with the contents of the newly promulgated by-laws as well as the Draft Single Land Use Scheme which will guide policy formulation going forward.

• The Spatial Development Framework has been amended to include proposed economic development centres.

Fellow Councillors,

As you probably will recall that I have in previous sittings mentioned that our goal as a municipality this year is to grow the economy and create jobs, and I said I would return to council with a practical plan detailing how this will be realised.

It is for this reason that we have identified areas where we can fully exploit our growth potential in order to realise our goal.

I would like to introduce to you the concept of Economic Development Centres.

These are centres which will ensure that we realise our much-anticipated prospect for economic growth and the creation of jobs.

These hubs, which will be situated in Mamello, Lakeside, Kliprivier, De Deur and Sicelo will each target specialised economic activities that are able to be integrated to serve the overall needs of Midvaal and its residents.

The centres will also be used as avenues for employment, as majority of jobs at these hubs will be given to locals.

The Lakeside hub will develop a milling plant that will produce maize products and animal feeds to supply local businesses and several government departments.

The De Deur centre aims to establish an Agri-processing facility that will comprise of the following uses: agricultural and agro-processing purposes, restaurant, car wash and mini/family market/s, training facility, production infrastructure, pack house with cold storage and administration offices.

The Kliprivier hub would create a tourism objective for Midvaal in partnership with investors including Heineken and the Netherlands Embassy.

The ultimate aim of such a centre would be to increase our visibility beyond the South African borders and make Midvaal one of the top tourism destinations in Gauteng, by creating bespoke Midvaal travel experiences to draw visitors.

The objective of the Mamello EDC would be to create an upholstery and sewing hub that will provide the municipality and other local businesses with clothing, work gear and other upholstery services.
The Sicelo economic development centre will establish a plastic manufacturing plant which will supply local businesses, the municipality and other stakeholders with plastics and related products.

These are just some of the ways we can realise our goal to grow the economy and create job:

- Establish strong partnership with relevant stakeholders
- Package each economic development centre for investment purpose with accurate development controls
- Outline the necessary compliance processes with reliable timelines
- Prepare precinct plans per economic development centre
- Tender process to appoint an investor to partner with
- Establish availability of infrastructure

We continue to urge our communities to consider the draft documents and make their inputs where necessary, and assure our residents that all decisions made pertaining to this will be fairly balanced, taking into consideration the impact on the livelihood of our communities, but also the cost to the municipality.

I sincerely hope that you too will consider these inputs favourably.

Speaker,

On the 24th of February, we partnered with gospel musician Lebo Sekgobela to host a prayer and healing service for the community of Mamello in Vaal Marina, which as we remember was hit by a tornado on December 11.

The event was an overwhelming success and we were happy to have received a warm welcome from the community on that day, and to have been able to rejoin in the day’s celebrations with them.

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Lebo Sekgobela, her team and everyone else who made the day what it was.

Fellow Councillors,

Next week I will be visiting parts of the municipality to mark Easter Weekend celebrations, and invite those of you who would like to join me to do so.

Part of my programme will include visits to NGOs like the Sicelo Early Learning Centre as well visits to our local Christian ministries including the Masinga church in Reitspruit and Gospel Fire Evangelical Ministries.

I would like to wish all our Christian residents well as you celebrate Easter, may we use this time not only to rest and reflect on our personal journeys, but also to lend a helping hand to someone in need.
May we also use this period of spiritual introspection to reflect on our role in society, and how we can work together to build the Midvaal and South Africa we want.

Thank you!