Good Afternoon.

This month has been an especially painful and regretful one for our country.

Painful because we had to say goodbye to a woman who has been a strong pillar of our people— even those who never had the privilege of meeting her or even being aware of the sacrifices and great work she put in towards ensuring the liberation of black people in South Africa.

Regretful, because Winnie Madikizela-Mandel lived her entire life under a dark cloud only because she refused to live a life dictated by anyone except herself. She was ostracised and isolated because she dared to be a fearless, relentless and confident black woman in a world that does not accept such bravery and assertive from a woman, let alone a black one.

She dared to be present and show strength in the midst of a system that was meant to break her.

And as if this was not enough, in the days following her passing, there were many who still refused to acknowledge the sacrifices Mama Winnie made for this country and its people.
Instead, many chose to further taint her image by focusing on unsupported claims made against her because it serves their hatred and disapproval of not only her but also black, strong, women.

As we continue to celebrate the life and legacy of Winifred Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela may we also make a pledge tell future generations the real story of who she was and her contribution in liberating the people of this country.

May we recognise women for who they are and their personal contribution to society, and not whom they are married or associated to.

And may we create environments where women are free to be strong, bold and assertive without imposing limitations based on our ideas of what a woman should be.

I would like for us to stand and observe a moment of silence in memory of Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, for the sacrifices she made in freeing us from the oppressive system of apartheid and for refusing to be silenced until her death.

I would also like to send our heartfelt condolences not only to the Madikizela and the Mandela families – but also to our ANC colleagues here today.

As we’ve heard these past few weeks – Winnie Madikizela-Mandela did not die – she has multiplied and her legacy will continue to be felt for many generations to come.

Colleagues,

I would like to congratulate the ruling party in Midvaal, which recently held a successful Federal Congress where we elected our new leadership, in who’s abilities we have full confidence to take this country where it needs to be in the coming years.

We also adopted resolutions which reaffirm our commitment to good governance, growing the economy and clamping down on corruption, ensuring diversity and equal opportunities for everyone as well getting South Africans into decent jobs and keeping them there.

Speaker,

As many of you may be aware, the community of Sicelo Ward 8 recently held a march to our head offices to hand over a memorandum of grievances.
Noted in the memorandum were several complaints relating to housing developments in that area.

As we know, the Gauteng Human Settlements Department has committed to purchasing land where formal housing and social services will be provided for the community.

However, this has not happened at the pace the community had anticipated and as a result has led to their disapproval of these processes and consequently of Midvaal municipality as their first point of contact, despite the fact that we are not directly responsible for housing projects in the municipality.

As we have said before, we will continue to work with all relevant stakeholders in this regard to ensure that the people of Sicelo, and other communities, receive decent and quality housing.

We may not be directly responsible for providing this service – but we remain committed to advancing the best interests of our communities and ensuring that they have decent living is just one step towards ensuring that all our residents enjoy an equal quality of life.

Speaker,

I however, also want to take this moment to condemn those who’ve been encouraging acts of violence as a way of showing disgruntlement.

While we’ve seen in recent days that South Africans are increasingly turning to violence as a way of solving their issues – as has been evident in the past and recently with the protests in the North West and this past weekend through scenes coming from Moses Mabhida Stadium.

In fact, even today, many people were intimidated and threatened against showing up for work, all in the name of protesting.

To be clear, protests are necessary and hence have been provisioned for in the labour law, however it’s a shame that many rightful pleas go unnoticed because of the manner and approach taken by some people in making these demands.

We fail in our active citizenry if we allow vigilantes and people with ulterior motives to takeover and lead the genuine plight of our communities.

As Martin Luther once said “Nothing good ever comes of violence” while Pope John Paul the second also said “Social justice cannot be attained by violence as violence kills what it intends to create.”
There has to be better ways of engaging with one another if we are to truly realise any progress in the things we aspire for.

Speaker,

With regards to the Sicelo matter, I have written to MEC for Human Settlements in the province Dikgang Moiloa inviting him to come to the area and brief the community on progress made in addressing the housing challenges in Sicelo.

We now await a response from the MEC regarding when this will happen.

Speaker,

We recently concluded our rounds of draft budget meetings across the municipality.

We have received and considered all comments made by our communities in relation to the draft budget thus far and will be taking these into consideration as we consolidate and finalise our budget for the new financial year.

Fellow Councillors,

The economic state of our country, though showing some signs of improvement from the past few years, continues to place local governments under financial pressure.

Our residents across the municipality are increasingly feeling the pinch of the growing cost of living, and as a result, reliance on the municipality to provide more than just the basic services is also rising.

I fully recognise that our communities need more assistance from us now more than they have before, and while we too – as a municipality - are suffering our own constraints, our communities remain our priority and we will continue to work towards ensuring that we do the most with what we have to not only service our communities, but also create opportunities where people are able to live a quality life.

We urge our residents to continue submitting their comments before the May 4th deadline and call on those who were not able to attend the public participation meetings to access the draft budget on our website and also make their submissions.

Speaker,

A few weeks ago, we launched the ‘War on Potholes’ campaign to rid our municipality of dilapidated and unsafe roads by letting our residents directly inform
our engineering department about damaged roads, to make fixing quicker and more efficient.

Since the inception of the campaign we’ve received an overwhelming response from our communities and have – in just over a month had more than 200 complaints lodged – with 85% of those already attended to.

We look forward to launching similar initiatives in future – as they make serving our communities simpler and more efficient.

Speaker,

This month, we also launched a new campaign which we hope to roll out across the municipality as we strive to promote healthy living among our communities.

On the 12\textsuperscript{th} of April, we visited Sicelo Ward 10, where we had a morning aerobics session with our senior citizens.

We will be visiting other parts of the municipality in the coming months, and likewise, extend an invite to those who qualify as “senior citizens” to join us for these sessions.

Fellow Councillors,

I would also like to extend an invitation to you, for our Freedom Day Commemoration event taking place here tomorrow afternoon.

The event will be honouring the LGBTIQA+ community and highlighting the daily struggles they face while forging their place in our communities.

Their daily struggle for acceptance, equality and the freedom to be whomever they want to be.

Speaker,

As a heterosexual man, I cannot even begin to say I fully understand the plight of the LGBTIQA+ community, much like I cannot speak on behalf of women and the struggles they face on a daily in fighting for an equal place and recognition in our society.

However, as the governing party here in Midvaal, we make a pledge to support the LGBTIQA+ community and other marginalised groups in realising equal opportunities and non-discrimination, whether based on the colour of their skin, gender or sexuality.

We have been engaging with LGBTIQA+ organisations, to find ways in which we can work together in advancing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and allied persons.

While I will be the first to admit that there is far more we should’ve done at this point in advancing the rights of LGBTIQA+ persons I also believe that it is better to be late
than to not show up at all, and I pledge the municipality’s commitment towards showing up for our brothers and sisters in the LGBTIQA+ community.

As former US President Barack Obama once said “When all (people) are treated as equal, no matter who they are or whom they love, we are all more free.”

Speaker,

I am proud to announce that Midvaal has once again been ranked as the most financially sustainable municipality in Gauteng by Ratings Afrika’s Municipal Financial Sustainability Index for 2017.

We have managed to increase our rating score from 60/100 in 2016 to 68/100 in the last financial year.

This is more than double the Gauteng average score which currently sits at 30 index points, and the national average of 41 points.

This report not only confirms our commitment to good governance and prudent financial management, but also serves as assurance that Midvaal Local Municipality remains a financially viable and sustainable municipality.

We also hope that independent reports such as these also provide assurance to our communities that despite the many challenges we face as a municipality, and while there is still some mileage to be made in ensuring our vision to inclusively serve the needs of our communities, we are making great strides and continue to place their best interests at the forefront.

I would also like to thank our municipal staff, including our senior managers – some of whom are present here today – for their diligence and continued commitment towards ensuring that we do the best with the resources at our disposal to create a better life for our communities.

As I close,

I would like to wish everyone a happy Freedom Day.

May we remember the sacrifices of those who were determined to ensure that we get to enjoy our freedom on a daily, some even to the point of death.

But may we also be cognisant of the fact that all freedoms come with responsibilities, and while we celebrate our freedom, may we also acknowledge our privilege where it exists and advocate for those who are unable to speak for themselves, promoting equality for all persons, regardless of their class, creed, the colour of their skin, gender or sexuality.

Allow me to quote late President Nelson Mandela who once said “for to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”
Thank you!