



## Opening Address

**Bobby Peek**

### **Breathing Spaces: Environmental Portraits of Durban's Industrial South**

**Date: Thursday, 15 January 2009**

Dear community people from Cape Town, south Durban, the broader Cape Town Public, Professor Bredekamp, Jenny Gordon and Marijke du Toit

I am honoured to stand here in front of you and open this “people’s” exhibition that will tell you a story of the pain, suffering and challenges facing the people of the south Durban.

At the outset I must direct us to the people behind this exhibition: Marijke du Toit and Jenny Gordon, who worked tirelessly over three years with local people from the community such as Oliver Meth, Goerge Ruiters, Jabu Ncobo, ‘Mrs Perumal’ and many others and helped them to picture their communities and to share the insights which no outside photographer would be able to capture. This process was long and arduous because it sought to involve on a consistent basis the views of those that were photographed. It is a methodology that I am sure will make the south Durban people proud to stand up and say, these are our stories and our faces. Well done to the team, let us give them a warm round of applause!

This exhibition is a compilation of many stories of a people forgotten by the political leadership of the eThekweni Municipality and, indeed, by the political leadership of our Country. It is an exhibition of people *for* whom plans are made, rather than *with* whom plans are made. These plans seek to fragment and destroy a community that has in the past been broken, but which has stood up and endured and built itself again.

Whether you talk about the taking away of farming lands so that they can be made available to the likes of Mondi, Engen and Shell; the creation of the apartheid ‘cheap’ labour dormitory towns; or the forcing of peoples from all over KwaZulu-Natal onto sand dunes, the collective history of pain caused by the immoral system of separate development has brought a unity of experience and destiny.

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The pain and scenery that you will witness here tonight and over the next few weeks in these captured images is not only a local story, it is a national and global picture of how people suffer environmental injustices because they are less powerful than those that claim to represent them. Whether you are in Joe Slovo in the Tableview/Atlantis area or in Athlone and Epping Industrial Area, Sasolburg and the Vaal Triangle, Limpopo Province in communities living next to platinum mines, or in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, the faces and stories are the same - one where people are struggling to find a new way of living, a way of living without the oppression of pollution and out from under corporate power, in a society built on equality and solidarity.

In 1955, the Congress Freedom Charter, which was negotiated and agreed upon, stated that the 'people shall govern'. When one looks at the pictures that surround you, you must ask yourself: would people put themselves in this situation if they were governing?

The answer is no. It is correct to say that this was a creation of a brutal and evil regime of apartheid, but the landscape you see continues to develop based upon an industrial strategy that takes its economic fundamentals from the capitalist apartheid industrial strategy, and that is exploitation of labour and the environment and cheap energy.

It is my hope that while the broader Cape Town and hopefully international population walks through this exhibition over the next weeks, that the people come to realise that cities in South Africa are built upon a system that seeks to destroy the fabric of society, not only by the pollution that we see, but also by the plans to relocate people in order to make way for more of this type of development and pollution.

These faces and landscapes present you with people whose children do not know anything different than where they live: these stacks, the pollution, the fires at the oil refineries, the deaths and maiming of workers at these industries, the illnesses such as asthma and cancer have all become both common and accepted.

As we view this exhibition we also have to consider our democracy. Our democratic government is closing down democratic spaces that should be opening. Both the Ministry of Minerals and Energy Affairs and Environment and Tourism are creating and changing laws that will allow for refineries to be built in our neighbourhoods without consulting us and without giving the people the right to say no. If we dare challenge these processes, the Ministry of Safety and Security will, for good measure, ensure that you cannot intervene using apartheid legislation that is being rewritten under the "National Key Points and Strategic Installations Bill 2007".

It is my hope that this exhibition will bring back the energy to recapture the power that the residents of south Durban and South Africa currently do not have, the power to shape their own future and to be able to enjoy what has been rightfully bestowed upon them within the South African Constitution.

But we need to realise that the struggle in places such as south Durban cannot be won in south Durban. It needs the support of people throughout South Africa and I hope that this exhibition will give the rest of South Africa the courage to stand up and support the struggles of the peoples of south Durban and those elsewhere!

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