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Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Sweden – Roundtable discussion on local government cooperation

I am writing to inform you that the South African Embassy in Stockholm hosted a roundtable discussion on local government cooperation between South Africa and Sweden on 03 October.

As you know, there are a number of active, well-established partnerships between South African and Swedish municipalities and local authorities including your own. It is our understanding that the current country strategy for development assistance with South Africa funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) concludes at the end of 2013 and will not be renewed. I therefore felt it appropriate to use this opportunity to reflect on the successes of these local-level partnerships, address shortcomings and chart the way forward.

In bringing together local authorities that have partnerships in South Africa for such a session, I hoped participants would be able to share ideas and experiences and exchange information on the status of your projects. Furthermore, the presence of representatives from Sida, the International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) and the Swedish Association of Local Regions and Authorities (SALAR) contributed to the discussions on the future of local government cooperation in a positive way.

It was a privilege to interact with politicians and officials from across Sweden. I was particularly impressed by number of the projects these counties and communes have embarked upon with their South African partners, as well as the passion which they all share in working for community development and local democracy. The projects cover a broad range of areas; including but not limited to waste management, youth development and skills training, adult education and broadening public participation in decision-making. We learnt that there is indeed a pool of “aggregated learning” to draw upon and by harnessing this collective expertise, I feel

confident that the partnership between South Africa and Sweden will go from strength to strength.

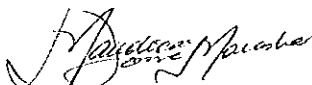
During the discussions, I highlighted the need of including business-people & entrepreneurs and even academia in delegations on exchange visits to and from Sweden to drive closer, mutual beneficial cooperation. It has been our observation that partnerships which include a wide range of actors enjoy greater sustainability. But of concern to some Swedish municipalities is the frequent turnover of staff which inhibits continuity and sustainability of long-term projects. It seems crucial that partnership includes widespread participation and support of officials and politicians alike.

I am convinced that such people-to-people contact is important, especially at local or community level. From my observation, the cooperation between South Africa and Sweden at municipal level is contributing to make both countries a better place. But perhaps we should also think how we could better share best practices and experience amongst our various municipalities in South Africa, amongst those who have agreements with Swedish local governments. From the meeting we had, it was clear the Swedish local governments appreciated it very much and actually suggested follow-up meetings. We should make use of this opportunity.

It is therefore essential that we support efforts that promote the strengthening of local democracy, as this touches on every one of us. As one Swedish mayor put it, "We all live in a municipality". I would encourage you to continue pursuing closer cooperation with your counterpart and invite you to share your experiences with the Embassy, not only if you visit Sweden in the near future, but I would also like to invite you to share your thoughts with me in writing, should you have the time.

Please be assured of my high consideration.

With kind regards,



MD Marasha
Ambassador