MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PSC

Welcome to the Special Edition newsletter on the Meeting of the Secretaries of the African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions. This newsletter serves to report on the highlights of the deliberations that have now formed the founding document for the envisaged Association for African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions.

The Secretary’s meeting was the culmination of the work that we, as African Public Service Commissions, were tasked to do in considering the creation of a common platform for African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions. The South African Public Service Commission (PSC) was tasked with coordinating the technical meeting of the Secretaries of these institutions, chaired by the Director-General, Ms Odette Ramsingh, a task which it proudly accepted. Little more than a year after the idea of such an Association was raised at the CAPAM Biennial Conference in Sydney, Australia, during October 2006, the various PSCs have through their combined efforts made significant progress in realising this ideal. I am proud of the active role that we as the South African PSC have played in this regard.

The creation of such an Association will give African Commissions the platform to share its wealth of expertise and generate solutions to perennial problems uniquely suited to the continent. Together we possess a wealth of knowledge and best practice in public administration which, if shared, can assist in improving the effectiveness of the machineries of our respective governments. For us there can be no better time for our Commissions and other Service Commissions to master the courage to get into the trenches and unite as one to support the renewal of the continent from a common platform than now.

I would like to thank all the Secretaries of the various Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions for their active participation in ensuring that a good quality draft founding document was produced and that a foundation for the formation of a representative Association is formed. I am confident that we are ready to put into motion the next phase for the realisation of this Association.

By the South African Public Service Commission

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LAYING THE FOUNDATION...

Several countries on the African continent have Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions which are responsible for public administration and whose functions are directed at improving the machinery of the state. In order to enhance our ability to address the interests of our citizens, a need was identified for the experts in this field to try to find common solutions to common problems facing our continent.

The establishment of an Association of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions was conceptualised in Sydney, Australia during the CAPAM Biennial Conference in October 2006 and the Roundtable Conference of African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) held in Arusha, Tanzania in December 2006. This was followed by a Record of Understanding reached by African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions in Swaziland in September 2007. In terms of the Record of Understanding, the Secretaries of the various Commissions were to convene to prepare a Founding Document for the Association and to consider the implications involved in the establishment thereof.

The Director-General of the South African Public Service Commission, Ms Odette Ramsingh, hosted the meeting of Secretaries of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions (Commissions) at a meeting held at the Sandton Sun, in Johannesburg, South Africa from 20 to 22 November 2007. Amongst others, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the requirements for the establishment of an Association that will serve as a formal structure for Commissions to harness their professional expertise and rally these to deal decisively with the challenges of development and the task of the renewal of our continent.

The meeting of Secretaries was a resounding success with close to 30 delegates representing Commissions from various countries attending. At the conclusion of the meeting an agreement was reached by all Secretaries on a draft Founding Document on the establishment of an Association of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions. Secretaries also signed an agreement during the meeting indicating their concurrence that the draft Founding Document be submitted to the next meeting of the Commissions for consideration. The finalisation of the draft Founding Document is seen as a milestone towards setting up the envisaged Association.

SETTING THE TONE OF THE MEETING...

The Deputy Chairperson of the South African Public Service Commission, Mr John Ernstzen, delivered the opening address at the meeting. He expressed his appreciation for the good attendance and stated that the level of attendance was indicative of the commitment and shared vision towards the promotion of good governance in the continent. Mr Ernstzen also mentioned that through a process of cooperation as envisaged through the establishment of this Association, respective members would be able to strengthen their capacity to give effect to the principles of sound public administration in their respective public services.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE MEETING...

The broad terms of reference of the meeting of Secretaries in terms of the Record of Understanding were to:

• prepare a founding framework for the Forum
• determine and address any legal impediments
• contact those Commissions not represented
• explore the possibility of setting up a website to facilitate interaction between the various delegates.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEETING...

The three-day meeting gave the delegates an opportunity to actively engage and debate on the components of the draft founding framework that would give guidance to the establishment of the Association. The meeting focused on the name, objectives, structure, format and resources of the Association. The synopsis below provides an outline on some of the issues that have been included in the draft Founding Document to be presented to the meeting of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions in Kampala in March 2008 for consideration and ratification.

The Association will be called the “Association of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions”, with the acronym “AAPSOCs”

Objectives of the AAPSOCs

• To provide a common platform for the Commissions to promote and share best practices.
• To promote professionalism in the conduct of the business of the Commissions.
• To promote research in human resources, public administration and management practices to enhance service delivery.

Structure of the AAPSOCs

The Association will operate independently and governance arrangements will be put in place. The following structures were proposed to ensure the smooth functioning of the Association:

• A General Assembly
• A Presidency of the Association
• An Executive Committee
• A Secretariat
• Committees of the Association
General Assembly

A General Assembly constituted by the Chairpersons of the registered Commissions will be established. The General Assembly will also comprise the Secretariat as ex-officio members.

They will meet once a year to deliberate on issues and proposals. During meetings, only registered members in good standing with the Association will have voting powers and all decisions shall be binding on all registered members, subject to the extent that they are not in conflict with the laws of the respective countries.

Presidency of the Association

The General Assembly will be headed by a President, who will serve a two-year term. The President will be elected by the General Assembly from amongst the Chairpersons of the member Commissions. To ensure equal governing of the Association, the Presidency position will rotate on a geographical regional basis. The regions are West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa and North Africa.

There will also be a Deputy to the President to amongst others, deputise when the President is not available. There will also be five Vice-Presidents and their alternates from each of the geographical regions, elected by the General Assembly.

The functions of the President will include convening meetings in liaison with the Secretariat, presiding over meetings of the General Assembly and Executive Committee, ensuring proper conduct during meetings and building consensus in decision-making.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will be headed by the President of the Association and will be constituted by the five Vice-Presidents. The Secretary of the Association together with the five secretaries of the Offices of the Commissions of the five Vice-Presidents will serve as ex-officio members of the Executive Committee. In recognising that the Executive Committee may require additional resources and expertise from time to time, they (Executive Committee) may co-opt members as deemed necessary to discharge its functions.

The main functions of the Executive Committee will be to provide strategic direction to the General Assembly, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the decisions of the General Assembly, and source funding for the Association in the interim.

Secretariat

The Secretariat will be headed by a Secretary which will be responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Association. In the interim, the Secretariat will be tagged to the Office of the Presidency, but as the Association evolves, a fully-fledged permanent Secretariat will be established.

Committees of the Association

In order to perform duties emanating from decisions of
the General Assembly and the needs identified by the Executive Committee, Standing and Ad-Hoc Committees will be established. Such Committees would, amongst other functions, conduct research and compile reports.

**Registration of the Association**

Membership to the Association will be on a voluntary basis. Only members from Public Service Commissions or other Service Commissions based in Africa, that have a commonality of interest, will be eligible to register.

In the interim, the founding members will in addition to the signing of the memorandum of understanding also complete a prescribed registration form to confirm membership and demonstrate commitment. As the Association evolves, there will be a move towards formal registration.

**Communication**

The geographical placement of Commissions serves as a barrier for constant communication. In order to facilitate interactive communication between the Commissions, a website will be developed. This website will only be accessible to registered members.

In the interim, this newsletter will fill this gap and ensure that current and potential members are kept updated about developments of this critical endeavour.

**THE WAY FORWARD...**

In order to formalise the establishment of the proposed AAPSOCs, it was decided that the next meeting of African Public Service Commissions and other Service Commissions should take place on the fringes of the AAPAM meeting to be held in Kampala, Uganda in March 2008.

The coordinating committee will take forward the matters identified during the meeting and the South African Public Service Commission will take the lead in the coordination process. The coordinating committee will comprise the following representatives from the five geographic regions in Africa:

- Ms Odette Ramsingh – Southern Africa
- Mr Donald Ndagula – East Africa
- Mr Japh Nwosu – West Africa
- North Africa – to be co-opted
- Central Africa – to be co-opted

The coordinating committee will also have to prepare a draft memorandum of understanding to be signed at the next meeting of the Commissions. Other Commissions in Africa that were not present at the meeting will be invited to participate in the Association.
SOCIALISING

Being a diverse group of public servants it was important for the delegates to interact on a social level, most importantly to create an understanding of the unique circumstances from a socio-political view, that is being faced in the countries represented. The group therefore had a cocktail function on the first night of the meeting followed by a tour of historical sights in Soweto.

COCKTAIL FUNCTION

After all the first day’s hard work, delegates were treated to a cocktail function. This gave them the opportunity to interact on a social level and also de-stress in preparation for the next days deliberations.

The Divinity band provided entertainment, as they enhanced the mood by playing music to suit everyone’s melodic taste. The music made all the delegates unite in song and dance.

TOUR OF HISTORICAL SITES

In order to ensure that our delegates had a Proudly South African experience, they were taken on a tour of Soweto’s historical sites.

The highlight of the tour was dining at Wandi’s Place in Soweto, where delegates were served a typical “township” meal. An exciting experience was also the tour of the Hector Pieterson Museum, which gave delegates a real feel of the drama of June 1976, when the students of Soweto took to the streets to protest against use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at schools during the Apartheid Era.

A tour of the well-known Vilakazi Street, the only street in the world to house two Noble Peace Prize winners gave delegates the opportunity to view Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s house and a tour inside the former home of Nelson Mandela.

The tour ended with the viewing of Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication and the full range of housing standards from squatter camps to up-market houses.

This was a truly moving and educational experience!
PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONS AND OTHER SERVICE COMMISSIONS

DURING THE MEETING PROCEEDINGS...

DURING THE COCKTAIL FUNCTION...
TOUR OF HISTORICAL SITES...