



MINISTRY
PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**ON THE OCCASION OF PROF. STAN SANGWENI
SECOND MEMORIAL LECTURE**

Theme: *“Ethical courage, constitutional accountability and unfinished
promise of land reform: honouring the legacy of Prof. Stan Sangweni”*

**ADDRESS BY
MINISTER
HON INKOSI MZAMO BUTHELEZI, MP
MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND
ADMINISTRATION**

Freedom Park Heritage Site, Pretoria:13 September 2026

13h30 - 17h00

Programme Director - Advocate Neo Sephoti

Your Excellency President Motlanthe

Chairperson of the Public Service Commission -
Professor Somadoda Fikeni.

All fellow Commissioners

Family of Prof Sangweni

Eminent guests - Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon.

It is **a solemn** privilege to join you this afternoon as we honour **a giant** of our public service - the late Professor Stan Sangweni - on the occasion of the Second Memorial Lecture held in his name.

Program director

We are not merely hosting a lecture; we are paying homage to an **enduring** legacy.

We are honouring a man who helped give **intellectual** meaning, **moral** weight and **institutional** form - to what we today endeavour to build - call a capable, ethical and developmental state.

I want to thank the Public Service Commission for sustaining this important tradition.

To honour those who built the ethical foundations of our democracy, year after year - is an act of institutional wisdom.

You could not have chosen a more fitting person in whose name to anchor this lecture than Prof. Sangweni.

Your theme this afternoon is not ceremonial, it is **stimulating** in the best sense: which is “*Ethical courage, constitutional accountability and unfinished promise of land reform.*”

In the life of Prof. Sangweni, these are not three separate topics. They are one story, one commitment, one life lived in service of the Constitution.

When we speak of ethical courage, we speak of Prof. Sangweni.

We speak often in government about ethics. We have codes, charters and pledges on office walls.

But Prof. Sangweni taught a generation that ethics is not a document - it is a decision. It is what you do when no one is watching; when looking away would be easier, when standing alone carries **a cost**, and yet you still choose what is right.

Ethical courage is often lonely, but it is never wasted.

Prof Sangweni reminded the country that the Commission is not there to please power, but to tell the truth to power. He taught us that a public servant's ultimate loyalty is not to a person or a faction, but to the Constitution and to the people of South Africa.

That is the character we are trying to **institutionalise** as we professionalise the public service - public servants who are not only qualified and competent, but who possess what Prof. Sangweni possessed:

A moral compass that **does not shake** when the political wind **changes**.

Again, when we speak of constitutional accountability, we speak of Prof. Sangweni.

He was among those who shaped the PSC into what the Constitution intended it to be - **not** a complaints desk, **not** an extension of a department, **but** the **conscience** of the state.

Independent, fearless, non-partisan and loyal only to the Constitution. Prof understood that accountability is not about fault-finding or scoring points. It is about **fidelity**.

Fidelity to the promise we made to our people in 1994 and to Chapter 10, which demands that our public service be professional, ethical, impartial, accountable and **development oriented**.

He gave that promise practical teeth. He insisted that accountability is not measured only in audit reports, but in the lived experience of the citizen who walks into a government office and **whether** they are treated with dignity.

As the Ministry for the Public Service and Administration, I **assure** the Commission that we see an empowered, respected and independent PSC not as a threat to the executive, but as a necessary partner in building the capable state our nation deserves.

Program director

When we speak of the unfinished promise of land reform, we are **challenged** by Prof. Sangweni the scholar, the rural development intellectual, and the activist.

He has always forced us to confront an uncomfortable truth: That we cannot speak credibly about an ethical and accountable state while the most fundamental question of dignity, belonging and economic inclusion - the question of land - **remains** unresolved.

For him, land was never a technocratic programme. It was a question of justice, of restoring dignity where it had been denied.

His question to us still stands;

Why does land reform remain unfinished after more than 30 years of democracy.

And this is not because we lack policies or laws, but because we **have at times** lacked the ethical courage and accountability, he embodied to confront vested interests, to act with urgency and to put the landless, the farmworker and the rural poor at the centre.

Prof Sangweni's life teaches us that you **cannot** be ethically courageous without being accountable, and you **cannot** be accountable while ignoring the historical injustice of land dispossession.

So, what does honouring his legacy mean?

Surely, it cannot be nostalgia. It cannot be a **once-a-year** applause.

Therefore, honouring Prof Sangweni means continuing his work. As we pursue professionalisation, we draw directly from his example.

Similarly, Prof Sangweni's life teaches us that even professionalisation **without ethical courage is hollow**. It is not just about qualifications and skills, it is about character, values and an unshakable commitment to the public good.

That is the Sangweni standard.

Program director

As I draw towards the conclusion, I want to challenge all of us here this afternoon that:

As we head towards the local government elections, let us **allow the legacy** of Prof. Stan to be **the true measure** of who is qualified to serve.

Not the loud appetite for power, not the hunger for positions and looting, but a **demonstrable** commitment to serve.

Prof. Sangweni is the embodiment of what public service should attract - people of integrity, humility and ethical courage. People who seek office not to enrich themselves, but to restore dignity where it has been denied.

That must be our standard for who we elect, who we appoint, and who we entrust with public resources.

It also means we must protect those public servants today, who show **the same** courage he showed. That integrity is rewarded, not punished.

That doing the right thing is the path to promotion, not persecution.

To the Public Service Commission - I commend you for sustaining this Memorial Lecture.

May it remain **a sacred tradition** where we pause **not** to honour power, **but** to honour **principle**.

And to the family of Prof. Sangweni - we thank you for sharing him with the nation. We honour him not only for what he did, but for what **he refused** to do. For the **silences** he refused to keep, for the **pressures** he refused to **bow to**.

His legacy lives not in books and speeches, but in every public servant who today chooses integrity over convenience, courage over comfort, and the Constitution over **expediency**.

Prof Sangweni did not just serve the state.
He dignified it.

As I conclude

Let me return to the lesson Prof Sangweni left us: that public service is not about power, but about duty.

Not about serving the powerful, but about serving the people with honour and integrity.

That is why we have invited to give us **a keynote address** - a leader who does not just preach those values but **lives them**.

President Kgalema Motlanthe is the **embodiment** of a leader who speaks truth to power, even when that truth points to himself and to his own movement.

In a time when many chose silence for self-preservation, he chose principle over expediency.

He has served this country for over five decades and has **never been tainted** by corruption - **a rare and towering** record of integrity in our public life.

As Secretary-General of the ANC, he was the anchor of the organisation during one of its most turbulent periods. He was the **unifier** when others divided, the **disciplinarian** when discipline was unpopular, and the **intellectual conscience** of the movement when populism was tempting.

President Motlanthe **steered** the ANC with firmness, humility and **strategic clarity**.

He is a true statesman who guided this Republic as President with calm and wisdom. Above all, he is a constitutional loyalist, not a party animal.

A leader who puts the Constitution and the people of South Africa first, always.

Therefore

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my singular honour and privilege to invite to this podium, to deliver the Keynote Address of the 2nd Prof Stan Sangweni Memorial Lecture,

His Excellency, Former President Kgalema
Motlanthe.

Mr President.