

JS 1 – 2024] SIXTH SESSION, SIXTH PARLIAMENT

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

OF

JOINT SITTING

THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2024

1. Members of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces assembled in the Cape Town City Hall at 19:00.
2. The Speaker of the National Assembly and Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces took the Chair.
3. The Speaker of the National Assembly requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.
4. The Speaker of the National Assembly announced that the President had called the Joint Sitting of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces in terms of section 84(2)(d) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, read with Joint Rule 13(1)(a), in order to deliver his State-of-the-Nation Address to Parliament.
5. [19: 05] The President of the Republic delivered his address as follows:

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Maseko, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Paul Mashatile and Mrs Mashatile, former President Thabo Mbeki, former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Baleka Mbete, Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, Deputy Chief Justice Ms Mandisa Maya, various justices who are present here, Mayor of Cape Town, Cllr Geordin Hill-Lewis, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and regional Deans, heads of institutions supporting democracy, eminent persons representing our nine provinces whom I just greeted a few minutes ago, Members of Parliament and fellow South Africans, as we were preparing for this state of the nation address, we were deeply saddened to hear of the

tragic passing of Dr Hage Geingob, the President of the Republic of Namibia.

President Geingob was a dear friend to me and the people of South Africa, and a comrade in arms in the struggle for our freedom. He was a champion of African peace, unity, progress and development. May I ask that we observe a moment of silence by rising in his honour as we remember him.

[Moment of silence observed, all members standing.]

Thank you.

Fellow South Africans, this state of the nation address takes place in the 30th year of our democracy.

On the 27 April 1994, millions of South Africans cast their ballots in a democratic election and many for the first time in their lives. That momentous day was the culmination of centuries of struggle – the struggle to liberate our people from suffering and oppression, dispossession and exploitation, poverty and inequality.

As we stood in the long, winding queues to vote, we turned to one another and spoke of our joy, sometimes with tears running down our cheeks. We embraced friends and strangers alike, encouraged by a sense of a common future that we were about to determine for our country with our votes.

We placed into those ballot boxes not just a vote, but a dream of the country we wanted to build. It was the dream of a South Africa that, in every sense, belonged to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

The world watched as Nelson Mandela, the father of our nation, cast his vote in Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal; the land of uShaka, a hero whose name echoes across the ages; the birthplace of John Langalibalele Dube, the first president of the ANC, the organisation which united the African people; and the home of Chief Albert Luthuli, the first African Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. In many ways, Nelson Mandela voting in Inanda at the place where John Langalibalele Dube is buried was symbolic because, by casting his vote there, he was reporting back to the first president of the ANC on how far the struggle had progressed.

After casting his ballot, Madiba said:

This is the beginning of a new era. We have moved from an era of pessimism, division, limited opportunities, turmoil and conflict. We are starting a new era of hope, reconciliation and nation-building.

It is this dream of a free and united people that is woven into our democratic Constitution. It is this Constitution that has guided our collective efforts over the last three decades to fundamentally change our country for the better, and it must stand at the centre of the work we do now to build a better life for all our people.

Over the last three decades, we have been on a journey, striving together to achieve a new society – a national democratic society. We have cast off the tyranny of apartheid and built a democratic state based on the will of the people. We have established strong institutions to protect the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all our people. We have transformed the lives of millions of South Africans, providing the necessities of life and creating opportunities that never existed for them before.

We have enabled a diverse economy whose minerals, agricultural products and manufactured goods are exported and reach every corner of the world, while creating jobs in our own country.

As a country, we have returned to the community of nations, extending a hand of peace and friendship to all countries and all peoples.

Just as we cannot deny the progress South Africans have made over the last 30 years, we should not diminish the severe challenges that we continue to face as a people. We have endured times of great difficulty when the strength of our constitutional democracy has been severely tested.

There have been times when events beyond our borders have held back our progress.

The global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 brought to an end a decade of strong growth and faster job creation.

More recently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict contributed to rising prices of fuel, food and other commodities across the world and has, as a result, made life more difficult for all South Africans.

There have also been times when events at home have shaken the foundations of our constitutional democracy.

Perhaps the greatest damage was caused during the era of state capture.

For a decade, individuals at the highest levels of the state conspired with private individuals to take over and repurpose state-owned enterprises, law enforcement agencies and other public institutions. In some cases, these activities were enabled by local and multinational companies.

Billions of rand that were meant to meet the needs of ordinary South Africans were stolen. Confidence in our country was badly eroded. Public institutions were severely weakened.

The effects of state capture continue to be felt across society, from the shortage of freight locomotives to crumbling public services, from the poor performance of our power stations to failed development projects in a number of places.

But South Africans, including many honest and dedicated public servants, fought back and worked together to defeat state capture. But even then, attempts to thwart the country's recovery continued.

We recall with great anguish the events of July 2021, when individuals loyal to their own interests sought to provoke a popular insurrection, leading to a tragic loss of life and widespread destruction.

Again, they were unsuccessful.

These efforts to undo the hard-won gains of our freedom failed because the people of South Africa stood firm together in defence of our Constitution and its promise of a better life for all.

It was the same determination that enabled the country to endure the devastation of COVID-19, the worst global pandemic in over a century. More than 100 000 South Africans lost their lives to that disease and more than two million people lost their jobs.

Yet, it would have been far worse if we had not acted together as South Africans to stop the spread of the virus, to support our health workers, to protect the most vulnerable, and to roll out an unprecedented vaccination programme. We were able to unite society around a common effort to save lives and livelihoods.

I want to pay tribute to the many thousands of South Africans who made financial contributions to the Solidarity Fund, to the workers who produced medical supplies, and to the nurses, doctors and other health workers, soldiers and police who also risked their lives to care for those who were ill.

Another major challenge we have to address during this period is gender-based violence and femicide, a challenge which we characterised as the second pandemic.

As government, we have introduced laws and directed more resources to prosecuting perpetrators, providing better support to survivors, and promoting women's empowerment at the economic level. As a society, we must intensify our collective efforts to bring gender-based violence and femicide to an end.

In recent years, the country has had to confront the effects of climate change. We have had devastating wildfires here in the Western Cape, destructive floods in KwaZulu-Natal, unbearable heatwaves in the Northern Cape, persistent drought in the Eastern Cape, and intense storms in Gauteng and North West.

Much of the task of this administration was to get our country through these great challenges and to work to regain our way.

While each of these events has left its mark, our country has weathered every storm and every challenge it has confronted.

Yes, we have the scars to show. But, in every case South Africans have been resolute. We have not only persevered, but we have also come back

stronger and more determined from all these calamities that befell our country.

All these efforts have demonstrated how South Africans value the freedom that was won after decades of struggle. The story of the first 30 years of our democracy can best be told through a number of initiatives that have been embarked upon in the 30 years.

But I think that the story can best be told through the life of a child called Tintswalo, who was born at the dawn of democracy in 1994.

Tintswalo – democracy’s child – grew up in a society that was worlds apart from the South Africa of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

When Tintswalo arrived in South Africa she found that most things had changed. She arrived to a South Africa in which the work of our government would enable her to move forward. She grew up in a society governed by a Constitution rooted in equality, the rule of law, and affirmation of the inherent dignity of every citizen.

Tintswalo, and many others born at the same time as her, were beneficiaries of the first policies of the democratic state to provide free health care for pregnant women and children under the age of six.

Tintswalo’s formative years were spent in a house provided by the state, one of millions of houses built to shelter the poor.

At the time of her birth, she found houses being built by the new South African government. Those who were born before her grew up in dilapidated houses. When she was born, she discovered that the South African government was building many houses for people.

Tintswalo grew up in a household provided with basic water and electricity, in a house where her parents were likely to have lived without electricity before 1994.

In 1994, many people did not have electricity but, when Tintswalo was born, electricity was provided by the state.

Tintswalo was enrolled in a school for which her parents did not have to pay school fees, and each school day she received a nutritious meal as part of a programme that today supports 9 million learners from poor families.

Everyday Tintswalo goes to school in the morning. At some schools, she has breakfast while at others she has lunch. This had never happened in the past; it was never there. It is happening today because we have a new government in South Africa which is making things happen.

The democratic state provided a child support grant to meet Tintswalo’s basic needs. This grant, together with other forms of social assistance, continues to be a lifeline for more than 26 million South Africans every month.

With this support, Tintswalo – democracy’s child – was able to complete high school.

Through the assistance of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, Tintswalo attended one of our TVET colleges and obtained a qualification.

When Tintswalo entered the world of work, she was able to progress and thrive with the support of the state’s employment equity and black economic empowerment policies.

With the income she earned, she was able to save, start a family, move into a better house and live a better life. She was also able to support her parents.

This is the story of millions of people who have been born since the dawn of our democracy. Whether people like it or not, this is the reality of many people in our country.

But truth be told, it is only part of the story.

Despite the remarkable achievements of the last 30 years, many of democracy’s children still face great challenges. Millions of young people aged 15 to 24 are currently not in employment, education or training. There are many who have a matric certificate, a diploma or a degree, who are not able to find a job, or do not have the means to even start a business. This is a trend that prevails in many countries around the world.

While economic growth is essential to reduce unemployment, we cannot wait to provide the work that many of democracy’s children need. As government we have taken steps to address the youth unemployment challenge. Yesterday I had the privilege to be in the presence of almost a 1 000 young people who were bearing witness to how, through the various initiatives that government and the private sector have put in place, they were able to see progress in their own lives.

Three years ago, building on the experience and success of the Expanded Public Works Programme, we launched the Presidential Employment Stimulus. Through this programme, we have been able to create more than 1,7 million work and livelihood opportunities. Through the stimulus, we have placed more than 1 million young people as school assistants in 23 000 schools.

If you go around our country and talk to school principals and teachers, they will tell you how beneficial this programme has been in assisting them in their schools but, more importantly, how beneficial this programme has been to these young people who are being introduced to the world of work.

This has provided them with valuable work experience while improving learning outcomes.

Through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, we have established what we call SAYouth.mobi as a zero-rated platform for unemployed young people to access opportunities for learning and earning. Over 4,3 million young people are now engaged on the network and 1,6 million have so far secured opportunities.

We have, working together with the National Youth Development Agency, NYDA, set up a number of initiatives to provide opportunities for young people, including the National Youth Service and the Youth Employment Service, where we are co-operating and working with the private sector.

A number of companies in our country have signed up to this as they have seen the need to join in the task of creating job opportunities for young people. These programmes matter because work matters to people. The NYDA has played a key role in assisting a number of young people to start their own businesses. Having a job does not only provide an income – it is also fundamental to people’s sense of self-worth, dignity, hope, purpose and inclusion.

From the depths of deprivation and inequality, we have worked for over 30 years to ensure that all South Africans have an equal chance to prosper. We have sought to live up to leaving no one behind.

It is not enough to recognise the injustices of the past; we need to correct them.

We have introduced laws and undertaken programmes to enable black South Africans who were previously disadvantaged and prevented from getting into many opportunities ...

We have also enabled women to advance in the workplace, become owners and managers, acquire land and build up assets. Because they are women, they were prevented by laws of the past from doing so.

The proportion of jobs in executive management held by black people increased exponentially — almost five-fold — between 1996 and 2016.

One of the overriding challenges this administration had to deal with when it took office was state capture and corruption. Our first priority was to put a decisive stop to state capture, to dismantle the criminal networks within the state and to ensure that perpetrators faced justice. We had to do that so that we could restore our institutions and rebuild our economy.

We appointed capable people with integrity to head our law enforcement agencies, government departments, security services and state companies, often through an independent and transparent processes.

The credibility and efficiency of a number of institutions like the SA Revenue Service has been restored and their performance has improved. Some may not like this, but that is the reality.

We set up the Investigating Directorate as a specialised and multidisciplinary unit within the National Prosecuting Authority to investigate corruption and other serious crimes. Great progress has been made in bringing those responsible for all these acts of malfeasance to justice. More than 200 accused persons are being prosecuted as we speak. More are under investigation.

Stolen funds are being recovered.

Freezing orders — I see you love this — of R14 billion have been granted to the NPA's Asset Forfeiture Unit for state capture-related cases, and around R8,6 billion in corrupt proceeds have been returned to the state.

A restored and revitalised Sars has collected R4,8 billion in unpaid taxes as a result of evidence presented at the State Capture Commission, while the Special Investigating Unit has instituted civil litigation to the value of R64 billion.

We have taken steps, including through new legislation, to strengthen our ability to prevent fraud and secure our removal from the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force.

With the assistance of business, we have set up a digital forensic capability to support the NPA's Investigating Directorate, which in due course will be expanded to support law enforcement more broadly.

Legislation is currently before Parliament to establish the Investigating Directorate as a permanent entity with full investigating powers.

But there is much more work to be done to eradicate corruption completely.

Based on the recommendations of the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council, we are determined to introduce further measures to strengthen our anticorruption agencies, protect whistle-blowers, regulate lobbying, and prevent the undue influence of public representatives in procurement.

We will not stop until every person responsible for corruption is held to account. We will not stop until all stolen money has been recovered. And yes, we will not stop until even those blue-chip corporations that were involved in state capture are held accountable.

The real tragedy of state capture was that it diverted attention and resources away from what government should have been doing, which is to grow our economy and create jobs.

Over the past five years, we have worked earnestly to revive our economy from a decade of stagnation and protect it from both domestic and global shocks. We have made progress in a number of ways. Our economy is today three times larger than it was 30 years ago. The number of South Africans in employment has increased from 8 million in 1994 to over 16,7 million today.

Over the last two years, the number of jobs being created has been increasing every quarter, and we now have more people in employment than before the pandemic. Yet, our unemployment rate is the highest it has ever been. Even as employment is growing, more people are entering the job market each year than there are jobs being created.

We have laid a foundation for growth by embarking on far-reaching economic reforms, an ambitious investment drive, and an infrastructure programme that is starting to yield results.

Companies continue to invest, thousands of hectares of farmland are being planted, new factories are being opened and production is being expanded.

We are on track to resolve the most important constraints on economic growth by stabilising our energy supply and fixing our logistics system.

As these obstacles are removed, the true potential of our economy will be unleashed.

We set out a clear plan to end load shedding, which we have been implementing with a single-minded focus through the National Energy Crisis Committee.

We have delivered on our commitments to bring substantial new power through private investment on to the grid, which is already helping to reduce load shedding.

Last year, we implemented a major debt-relief package which will enable Eskom to make investments in maintenance and transmission infrastructure and ensure its sustainability going forward.

Since we revived our renewable energy programme five years ago, we have connected more than 2 500 MW of solar and wind power to the grid with three times this amount already in procurement or construction.

Through tax incentives and financial support, we have more than doubled the amount of rooftop solar capacity installed across the country in just the past year.

We have implemented sweeping regulatory reforms to enable private investment in electricity generation, resulting in more than 120 new private energy projects now being in development.

These are phenomenal developments that are driving the restructuring of our electricity sector in line with what many other economies have done to increase competitiveness and bring down energy prices.

Through all of these actions, we are confident that the worst is behind us and the end of load shedding is finally within reach.

But we are not stopping there.

To ensure that we never face a similar crisis ever again, we are reforming our energy system to make it more competitive, sustainable, and reliable into the future.

We are going to build more than 14 000km of new transmission lines to accommodate renewable energy over the coming years. To fast-track this process, we will enable private investment in transmission infrastructure through a variety of innovative investment models.

We will approach those who have money and call them to invest in electric transmission infrastructure so that ours can be reliable.

Last year, we tabled the Electricity Regulation Amendment Bill to support the restructuring of Eskom and establish a competitive electricity market. As we undertake these reforms, we are positioning our economy for future growth in a world shaped by climate change and a revolution in green technologies.

In the last three years, our country has seen an increase in extreme weather events, often with disastrous consequences. This is why we are implementing a just energy transition, not only to reduce carbon emissions and fight climate change, but also to create growth and jobs for our own people in the future.

We will undertake this transition at a pace, scale, and cost that our country can afford and in a manner that ensures energy security. So, we will not be compelled to embark on processes that are going to disadvantage our country in this regard.

With our abundance of solar, wind and mineral resources, we are going to create thousands of jobs in renewable energy, green hydrogen, green steel, electric vehicles, and other green products.

The Northern Cape, with its optimal solar conditions — some of the very best in the world — has already attracted billions of rand in investment.

We are going to set up a Special Economic Zone in the Boegoebaai port to drive investment in green energy. There is already a great deal of interest from the private sector, with companies such as Sasol and many others ready to participate in the boom that will be generated through our green hydrogen energy projects.

We have decided to support electric vehicle manufacturing in our country to grow our automotive sector, which provides good jobs to thousands of workers.

In this regard, we are already at an advanced stage of cooperating with our neighbours – countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo which is well-endowed with critical minerals, and Botswana which is already involved in parts of the value-chain of automotive manufacturing. With all these countries, we'll be able to form an incredibly powerful ecosystem that is going to enable all of us to benefit from the green energy revolution.

We have decided to give special focus to regions like Mpumalanga to enable the creation of new industries, new economic opportunities, and sustainable jobs.

In the past year, we have increased the financing pledges for our Just Energy Transition Investment Plan from around R170 billion to almost R240 billion.

To address the persistent effects of global warming, which manifest themselves through persistent floods, fires and droughts, we have decided to establish a Climate Change Response Fund. This will bring together all spheres of government and the private sector in a collaborative effort to build our resilience and respond to the impacts of climate change.

This decision was inspired by the persistent calamities that we are subjected to. Almost every year, KwaZulu-Natal experiences massive floods that destroys infrastructure. Yes, the Western Cape is suffering from wildfires that continue to destroy quite a number of assets in our country. Indeed, many other provinces are actually suffering from the effects of climate change.

So, this fund — which we hope will gain traction similar to that of the fund we set up during COVID-19 — will support various areas that suffer from climate change.

To deal with severe inefficiencies in our freight logistics system, we are taking action to improve our ports and rail network and restore them to world-class standards. We have set out a clear roadmap to stabilise the performance of Transnet and reform our logistics system.

Working closely with business and labour, we have established dedicated teams to turn around five strategic corridors that transport goods for export purposes.

The number of ships waiting to berth at the Port of Durban — which has experienced severe congestion in recent months — has reduced from more than 60 ships in mid-November to just 12 ships at the end of January. That represents progress.

Transnet has appointed an international terminal operator to help expand and improve its largest terminal at the Port of Durban. And we are overhauling the freight rail system by allowing private rail operators to access the rail network.

With the current conflict in the Middle East affecting shipping traffic through the Suez Canal, South Africa is well positioned to offer bunkering services for ships that will be rerouted via our shores.

We completed, as we all know, the auction of broadband spectrum after more than a decade of delays, resulting in new investment, lower data costs and improved network reach and quality.

These reforms have a profound impact on a society in which access to the internet has risen dramatically over the last decade. Less than half of all households had internet access in 2011, compared to 79% of households in 2022. This means that more and more South Africans are using the internet. Some use it to trade. Some use it to improve their livelihoods. Some use it to learn. The internet is spreading further and further, even in our rural areas.

Just this week, we published new regulations to reform our visa system, a move which will make it easier to attract the skills that our economy needs and create a dynamic ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship.

We raised R1,5 trillion in new investment commitments through five South Africa investment conferences, of which over R500 billion has already flowed into the economy.

To support growth in the mining sector, we are moving ahead with the modernisation of our mining rights licensing system and are launching an exploration fund to support emerging miners and exploit new mineral deposits. Through this, mining, which has been the bedrock on which the South African economy was built, will once again become a sunrise industry.

Participation of previously disadvantaged black people is increasing. Black ownership stands at approximately 39% when compared to just 2% in 2004. This is progress, allowing black people to participate in a key industry in our economy.

Investment in infrastructure is gaining momentum. New and innovative funding mechanisms will be utilised to increase construction of infrastructure. The Minister of Finance announced this in his Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement last year when he said that we were now going to be able to fund infrastructure through the utilisation of innovative new methods. It could be build, operate and transfer. It could be embarking on investment vehicles as well as investment ideas that will enable us to speed up the construction of infrastructure.

The Department of Water and Sanitation aims to enhance water resource management by initiating infrastructure projects to secure water supply and diversifying water sources to reduce dependence on surface water. Water is such a major challenge in our country. So, this is actually answering the needs of our people to have water.

Many people in South Africa complain about water. They constantly tell us that they do not have water. They want us to provide them with water.

Bulk water projects are under construction across the country to improve water supply to millions of residents in villages, towns, and cities.

The following water infrastructure projects are in progress or completed: the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which is going to invest up to R40

billion, is now in progress; Umzimvubu, which we have been talking about for years, has now commenced; Hazelmere Dam; the uMkhomazi Water Project; the Clanwilliam Dam; the Tzaneen Dam; Loskop; Mandlakazi; the pipeline from Jozini Dam; Giyani; the pipeline from Nandoni Dam to Nsami Dam; Pilanesberg Water; Vaal Gamagara; and the pipeline from the Vaal River to Hothazel. All these are projects that are underway or have been completed.

In the Eastern Cape, the Msikaba and Mtentu bridges are beginning to rise over the landscape, and will be among the highest in Africa once complete. So, if you want to find the highest bridge in Africa you'll have to go to the Eastern Cape.

The steel used for part of the project is fabricated in Mpumalanga, and the iron ore comes from the Northern Cape.

In the past five years, Sanral, which manages nearly 25 000 km of road, has awarded more than 1 200 projects to the value of R120 billion. This means that the focus on constructing our roads, repairing our roads — yes, even attending to our potholes — is now underway. Yes, it is. If you talk to the premier of the Eastern Cape, he will tell you that many of the roads in the Eastern Cape are now being attended to. Similarly, when you talk to the premier of the Northern Cape, he will tell you the same.

Now, listen to this one. In November last year, Cabinet approved a framework for high-speed rail, focusing initially on the Johannesburg to Durban corridor.

As we grow the economy, we are making it more inclusive. Through redistribution, around 25% of farmland in our country is now owned by black South Africans. This has been confirmed by an eminent agricultural economist, Wandile Sihlobo, bringing us closer to achieving our target of 30% by 2030. He said to me, Mr President, we will have exceeded this target by 2030, because a number of initiatives are now underway to ensure that black South Africans have access to the ownership of land.

Over the last five years, we have supported around 1 000 black industrialists with funding and other forms of support. These black-owned firms employ more than 90 000 workers and contribute many billions of rand to our economy. Now, this is the revolution that is underway to bring more and more black people into the real economy. At the same time, about 200 000 more workers obtained ownership of shares in the companies that they work for, bringing the total worker ownership in companies in the South African economy to well over half a million workers. We see this trend continuing to grow as more and more companies realise that it is beneficial to their own operations and their businesses that their workers have a stake in the businesses that they work for. We call upon the private sector to go ahead and increase the participation of their workers in the businesses that they work for.

The reforms that we have initiated and the work that is underway will enable us — yes, as I said — to improve our logistics system, to achieve water security and, ultimately, lead to the creation of jobs.

While our challenges have never been greater, our response to these challenges will lead us to greater prosperity than we have ever known.

One of the worst injustices of apartheid was the manner in which education was used as a tool to perpetuate inequality and exploitation of black people. Over the last 30 years, we have sought to use education as a tool to create equality and to empower our people. Our basic education outcomes are steadily improving across a range of measures. The latest matric pass rate, at 82,9%, is the highest ever achieved. We congratulate the matriculants of 2023 on achieving this incredible pass rate.

With each new year, learners from no-fee schools account for more and more of the bachelor passes achieved. As I have often said, this is the silent revolution that is underway – that the children of the poorest parents in our country are now able to produce pass rates that are equal to and are even beginning to surpass the pass rates that you find at former Model C schools and at independent schools. This is the progress that we have been longing to see in our education system.

At the same time, fewer learners are dropping out of school.

We have increased funding for poor and working-class students in universities and TVET colleges significantly over the past five years.

Over the next five years, we will focus our attention on expanding access to early childhood development and improving early grade reading, an area in which we are already beginning to see progress.

Moving early childhood development to the Department of Basic Education was one of the most important decisions we have taken, as we are now able to devote more resources to early childhood development and ensure that through co-operative governance, various departments of government get involved in early childhood development programmes, augmented by the Department of Basic Education.

Our policies and programmes have, over the course of 30 years, lifted millions of people out of dire poverty. Today, fewer South Africans go hungry and fewer live in poverty. In 1993, South Africa faced a significant poverty challenge, with 71,1% of its population living in poverty. However, under the democratic government, there has been a consistent decline in these numbers.

By 2010, the poverty rate had dropped to 60,9%, and it continued to decrease, reaching 55,5% in 2020, as reported by the World Bank. This progress has been made possible by extensive support to those in society who need it most. Five years ago, we announced a further measure to tackle poverty by introducing the National Minimum Wage, as envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

The decision by key role-players, being business and labour and communities, to introduce the minimum wage immediately raised the wages of over 6 million workers who support their families.

In the midst of the pandemic, we introduced the special social relief of distress, SRD, grant, which currently reaches some 9 million unemployed people every month. We have seen the benefits of this grant and will extend it and improve on it as the next step towards income support for the unemployed.

These grants and subsidies do much more than give people what they need to live. They are also an investment in the future. Many people tend to dismiss this and say we are establishing a dependent society. But we are investing in our people and investing in their future as well. Social assistance has been shown to increase school enrolment and attendance, lower drop-out rates and improve the pass rate. This is what social assistance for our people does.

South Africans are living longer than ever before. Life expectancy has increased from 54 years in 2003 to 65 years in 2023. The World Health Organisation director-general says that this is a phenomenal development because many countries do not just move from 55 years to 65 years.

Maternal and infant deaths have declined dramatically. We have built more hospitals and clinics, especially in poor areas, providing better quality care to more South Africans. We are building new hospitals. One of those is a state-of-the-art type of hospital. It is the Limpopo Academic Hospital, which is currently under construction as we speak. I have, anecdotally, a good representation of how our health care system has been improving. When the ANC held its anniversary birthday, there was a bus accident in which five people passed away and scores were injured. They were taken to our hospitals in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. I went to see some of them. When they were asked if they wanted to move to a private hospital because they were on a private medical aid as a result of their job or whatever, many of them said, "No. We are being well looked after here." I see you love this. Now, this is what I experienced in just talking to those people who were lying in bed, who were injured, who testified that they were being well looked after in rural hospitals in Limpopo and in Mpumalanga.

Today, 95% of persons diagnosed with HIV know their status, 79% of those receive antiretroviral treatment, and 93% of those are virally suppressed. New HIV infections among young people have declined significantly.

And yet, while our health system has had a great impact on people's lives, we are working to improve both the quality of health care and equality of access.

The National Health Insurance Bill has been passed by both Houses and it will provide free health care at the point of care for all South Africans,

whether in public or private health facilities. The Bill has arrived at my desk. I'm going through the Bill. Yes, I am looking for a pen.

We plan to incrementally implement the NHI, dealing with issues like health system financing, the health workforce, medical products, vaccines and technologies, and health information systems.

One of the most visible, impactful and meaningful achievements in the first three decades of freedom has been in providing homes for people. Today, nearly nine out of every 10 households live in a formal dwelling, as said by the Statistician-General. Where there were once shacks and mud houses with thatch roofs, there are now homes of brick and mortar. These are homes with water to drink and to wash with, homes with electricity for lighting and cooking.

At the end of apartheid, only six out of 10 people had access to clean drinking water. Today, that figure has increased to nearly nine out of 10 South Africans.

We are working to ensure that subsidised housing is located close to work, education institutions and other services. But for services to be delivered, local government must work. When it comes to housing, we are also embarking on new and innovative funding mechanisms. We have tested these in the Northern Cape where we are doing what we call front loading. We launched, together with Premier Zamani Saul, a project that will result in 4 500 houses being built for a billion rand, funded through the Development Bank of SA. This is an innovation. We are now putting into practice these new methods of funding infrastructure to enable us to ramp up infrastructure so that the infrastructure build can power our economy and create more jobs.

Too many municipalities are failing on governance, financial and service delivery measures. These constraints affect every aspect of peoples' daily lives.

We have started the implementation of a number of measures to address this problem by providing support to local government, including professionalising the civil service and ensuring that people with the right skills and the appropriate capabilities are appointed to key positions, and that people are not appointed because they know so-and-so.

The Presidency, National Treasury and the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs are working together to enhance technical capacity in local government and to improve planning, co-ordination and fiscal oversight.

Through the Presidential Izimbizo that have been held across the country, we have seen how the district development model has brought together all spheres of government and key stakeholders to address the service delivery challenges in communities.

The district development model has proven to be an effective instrument to enhance co-operative governance and collaboration. Through this model we are breaking down the silos that we often find in government. Through this model, we are enhancing the working together of government departments. All layers of government also work together and adhere to what is set out in our Constitution. We will continue to broaden and deepen this process.

Tackling crime and insecurity is a key priority. South Africans deserve to be safe and to feel safe, to walk freely and without fear in their neighbourhoods and public spaces.

During this administration, we have focused on equipping our law enforcement agencies, which had been systematically weakened, to do their work effectively. We have strengthened the ranks of the police through the recruitment of 20 000 police officers — as I announced in the past two state of the nation addresses — over the last two years and another 10 000 will be recruited in this year too. An extra 5 000 police officers have been deployed to Public Order Policing.

The SAPS has launched a very effective operation or initiative called Operation Shanela. It is a new approach to target crime hotspots, and has resulted in over 285 000 arrests since May last year.

The Economic Infrastructure Task Teams that are operational in all provinces have had important successes in combatting cable theft, damage to critical infrastructure and illegal mining. Through close collaboration with the private sector, we have seen a reduction in security incidents on the rail network.

We launched the new Border Management Authority last year to improve the security of our borders, and have already stopped over 100 000 people who have tried to enter our country illegally.

Together with civil society, we have developed the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence, and as a society-wide response to this pandemic.

Around R21 billion has been dedicated over the medium-term to the implementation of the six pillars of the plan, including the economic empowerment of women.

New laws were introduced to strengthen the response of the criminal justice system to gender-based violence and to provide better support to survivors of such violence.

Our ultimate goal is to end gender-based violence altogether by mobilising all of society. As part of this, we support the call for a pledge that men in South Africa demonstrate their personal commitment to ending this scourge. This initiative of signing a pledge was initiated by young boys at a school called Benedict. They have drafted a pledge that men should sign and commit to. We discussed this at the Cabinet lekgotla and felt,

collectively, that we as the men of South Africa, taking our cue from the young boys at the school, should also be mobilised to sign this pledge.

Women are also in the process of developing their own pledge, which will speak to the issues of women and their experiences of gender-based violence. This pledge will be flighted publicly and I, the Deputy President and everyone in Cabinet will be the first to sign this pledge.

We still have a long way to go to build safer communities, prevent violent crime, and protect our infrastructure. But there is no doubt that a professional, well-trained and properly resourced police service, working closely with communities, will make our country a safer place.

There is therefore a further call for the setting up of community policing forums that should be effective, which we as government have committed to funding.

Today, every South African can hold their heads high, confident that we have assumed our rightful place on the world stage. We remain committed to playing a constructive role on our continent and around the world for the realisation of a better Africa and a better world. We will continue to play an important role to silence the guns throughout our continent.

Our engagements with parties in the Russia-Ukraine conflict through the Africa Peace Initiative are progressing. We engage in these peace efforts because we believe that even the most intractable conflicts can be brought to an end through negotiations.

Guided by the fundamental principle of human rights and freedom, we have taken up the Palestinian cause to prevent further deaths and destruction in Gaza. We know that there are some in our nation who do not support this cause that we have embarked upon.

We have welcomed the ruling of the International Court of Justice that Israel take all measures within its power to prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians. We condemn the killing of civilians on all sides and call on all parties involved in the conflict to commit to a peace process that will deliver a two-state solution, as resolved by the United Nations.

We will use our foreign policy to pursue our development goals. During our leadership of Brics last year, we witnessed a new chapter for the Brics family of countries. The expansion of the group from five to 10 countries presents opportunities for trade and a strengthening of political and diplomatic ties between countries in the global South.

We will build on the progress we have made in establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, which will transform South Africa's economy and that of the continent by creating new jobs and increasing economic participation across our continent.

And we will place Africa's development at the top of the agenda when we, as South Africa, host the G20 in 2025.

The achievements over the last three decades are a testament to the power of collaboration and partnership to address our most pressing challenges.

Our country has a vibrant civil society, a powerful union movement and an engaged private sector. Over the last five years, we have worked with these social partners to address challenges such as keeping people safe and distributing vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, and mobilising a society-wide response to gender-based violence.

In the past year, we have come together with social partners to end load shedding, address the challenges in the logistics sector, tackle crime and corruption, and accelerate job creation.

This is the South African way of building a social compact working together on tangible issues, and it will be the key to building a new society in the years to come.

This is the last state of the nation address of the 6th democratic administration.

There is a word in isiZulu: sizobuya. It means, we will be back. When we are back, people would say, indeed, they are back. Those who seems excited when I say this is the last state of the nation address.

They are thinking we are not coming back. Surely, we will be back here in this place.

The last five years has been a time of recovery, rebuilding and renewal. We have had to revitalise our economy after more than a decade of poor economic performance. We have had to rebuild our public institutions after the era of state capture. We have had to recover from a devastating global pandemic that caused great misery and hardship, that closed businesses and cost our nation many jobs and lives. And we have had to confront and overcome a debilitating electricity crisis that, despite significant improvement in recent months, continues to hold back our economy.

We have come a long way in the last five years. We have built on the achievements of the last three decades and we have taken decisive measures to address the immediate challenges facing South Africans.

We have restored the independence and capability of our law enforcement agencies to tackle corruption and crime.

We have worked to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. We took great pride in making South African Sign Language the 12th official language of our country.

We have safeguarded and promoted the basic rights in our Constitution, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of association and belief. We have defended media freedom and the independence of the judiciary.

We have protected and advanced the rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community and continue to combat all forms of prejudice and intolerance including those affecting people with albinism.

We have made significant progress on measures to grow the economy, create jobs and reduce poverty.

While we have set in motion the process of renewal and reform, there is more work to be done to see these reforms through to the end. We will finish the work this is underway and ensure that it goes ahead.

The work we have started in the last five years is progressing well. It will continue to progress.

We will continue with the work we started, whether they like it or not. It will continue.

Working with our partners, we will be able to revive our economy. Yes, we will tackle and deal with the debilitating effects of load shedding and deal with our ports and their logistics.

We will continue to strengthen our law enforcement institutions, tackle gender-based violence and fight corruption to make South Africa a safe place for all.

We will continue to strengthen local government. The initiatives that I spoke to will go ahead. We will professionalise the Public Service and increase the capacity of the state so that the state can serve our people better. We will ensure, as the Auditor-General has said, that we hold those in office accountable, and that there is consequence management for those who do wrong things.

We will continue to position our economy to grow and compete in a fast-changing world. We will also support small businesses by providing funding and by providing resources to small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as giving young people economic opportunities to thrive and to start their own businesses and succeed. We will continue to provide social protection to the vulnerable.

We will continue the work to improve the country's fiscal position and hold firm to a sound macroeconomic trajectory.

We will use the opportunities provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area to increase our trade and expand our industries.

We will continue to protect workers' rights and improve their wellbeing in places of work. We will also continue to make sure that our workers are well treated.

We will continue to build an inclusive economy, focusing on the empowerment of black people and women South Africans. Yes, we will

intensify land reform and pursue a just energy transition that leaves no one behind.

Fellow South Africans, as we celebrate 30 years of freedom, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to our constitutional democracy and its promise of a better life.

We should not give in to those who resist the responsibility that the Constitution places on us to correct the injustices of the past and fundamentally transform our economy and society.

We must remind these people of the obligation that the Constitution places on the state to progressively realise the rights of everyone to housing, health care, food, water, social security, safety and education.

By the same measure, we should not allow anyone to diminish our vital democratic institutions, to denigrate the judiciary or to challenge the constitutional authority of this Parliament.

We should not give in to those who seek to divide our nation, incite violence and undermine our democracy.

As in the past, as in the future, the people of South Africa should stand together against any attempt to reverse the achievements of our democracy.

As the Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, I worked with many great leaders of our country to craft a constitution that truly reflected the will of the South African people.

As President, I see it as my primary duty to defend our Constitution, and to work every day to realise its promise.

As we move forward, let us remember that it is up to us — not anyone else — to determine the future of South Africa.

We are not passive observers of our history. We are its authors. We are the builders of this country we call home.

As we look towards the next 30 years of freedom, we must choose the kind of country, and indeed the kind of world, we want to create for ourselves and for our children.

We are committed to a South Africa in which our common identity lies in our recognition of each other's humanity. We want a country in which every person is free to be exactly who they are, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, their ethnicity or their religion. We want a country in which the same opportunities are available to every child, whether they are born in Sandton, in Mdantsane, in Sekhukhune, in Mitchells Plain or in Phoenix.

We want a country in which the rule of law applies to everyone, no matter how wealthy they are or what position they hold.

As we continue the journey together to make this vision a reality, we are inspired by democracy's children, by their energy, by their creativity and by their enthusiasm.

We are inspired by the young people who have carried our hopes onto the global stage with their music and dance. We are inspired by Tyla who recently won a Grammy award. We are inspired by Bafana Bafana. We are also inspired by the Springboks. Yes, they inspire us.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of our freedom, we are reminded of the words of President Nelson Mandela, who said that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. That is where we are.

He said:

I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come.

But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

President Mandela once said: "This journey is long. This journey is long indeed."

While we have come far, we have a long way still to go.

Like Madiba, we must keep moving, always forward, always onwards, towards the country of our dreams. Always believing that victory is certain, because indeed it is certain.

Thank you very much, fellow South Africans. Good night. Thank you.

6. The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces adjourned the Joint Sitting at 20:47.

X George
Secretary to Parliament