



**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES, HONOURABLE MR A. N. MASONDO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MINISTERIAL BRIEFING ON POVERTY INDEX AND POVERTY LINES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**VENUE:** HYBRID    **DATE:** 20 OCTOBER 2020    **TIME:** 10H00

Programme director, Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Ms Sylvia Lucas

Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Honourable Ms Thembi Siweya

House Chairpersons of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Ms Winnie Ngwenya and Honourable Mr Jomo Nyambi

Chief Whip of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Mr Seiso Mohai

Honourable Permanent and Special Delegates

Representatives of the South African Local Government Association

Statistician-General and Head of Statistics South Africa, Mr Risenga Maluleke

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme Director, thank you for the opportunity to make the opening remarks on this occasion of the Ministerial Briefing Session on the Poverty Index and Poverty Lines in South Africa, which will also deal with the impact of the changes in the cost of goods and services and consumption patterns to household poverty and food security.

Today's session, in our programme of Ministerial Briefings, deals with a critical challenge for our society – poverty.

Poverty and human dignity are interlinked. Poverty is seen as a violation of human rights. This is so because dignity is a value of all people, which they are born with as human beings. It is a founding value of our democratic state. Therefore, an affront to human dignity is an affront to the foundations of our Constitution. Our Constitution states clearly that everyone has an inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.

The United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights share the view that poverty is not only deprivation of economic or material resources but a violation of human dignity too. Their position is that poverty erodes or nullifies economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education. The same is true of civil and political rights, such as the right to a fair trial, political participation and security of the person.

Programme Director, when we ushered the new democratic government in April 1994 we declared, through the Reconstruction and Development Programme, that our past was one of deprivation. The following extract sums up our assessment:

*“Our history has been a bitter one dominated by colonialism, racism, apartheid, sexism and repressive labour policies. The result is that poverty and degradation exist side by side with modern cities and a developed mining, industrial and commercial infrastructure. Our income distribution is racially distorted and ranks as one of the most unequal in the world – lavish wealth and abject poverty characterise our society”.*

This observation clearly demonstrated that the new democratic government was to undertake a mammoth task. It was the unenviable task of dealing with a legacy of centuries of colonial rule and decades of ruin by the apartheid administration. Throughout this period the majority of South Africans were systematically disempowered, resulting in them having fewer or no options to participate in the economy.

This reality compelled us to preface our Constitution, which we adopted in 1996, with a commitment to “heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights”. This was to be achieved through the agency of freely elected representatives and the citizens of our country.

In order to address this huge challenge of deep-seated poverty among the majority of South Africans, the democratic government implemented a range of poverty alleviation strategies. These included strategies:

- To grow the economy,
- To improve the quality of education,
- To help implement job creation measures,
- To implement infrastructure programmes aimed at addressing the basic consumption needs of households, and
- To implement social security measures, amongst others ...

However, while these constituted truly commendable efforts to improve the quality of life of the people, the reality is that we are still far from reducing poverty in a meaningful way. In spite of our best attempts, the gulf between the poor and the rich seem to keep on widening.

It is out of this realisation that the National Development Plan, which provides a broad strategic framework to guide our key choices and actions, directs us to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. It states how this could be achieved, by raising living standards, through:

- Increasing employment;
- Higher incomes through growth in productivity;
- A social wage; and
- Good-quality public services

Programme Director, In keeping with the spirit of the Constitution, our role as this House of Parliament is to promote and oversee the adherence to the values of human dignity, equality, non-racialism, non-sexism, and all other rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. This is indeed a difficult task to achieve..... never easy.....

However, we should not tire to reinforce the foundational values of our society. We should not tire to turn the dreams of our forebears into reality. We should not tire in pursuing our mission of overseeing the implementation of the programmes that support the promotion of these fundamental values across all the spheres of government.

The late Secretary General of the United Nations and a son of Africa, Mr Kofi Annan, demonstrated this direct link between poverty and human rights when he said:

*"Wherever we lift one soul from a life of poverty, we are defending human rights. And whenever we fail in this mission, we are failing human rights."*

With these few words, programme Director, it is my pleasure to open this important Ministerial Briefing session on such an important subject of poverty.

I thank you