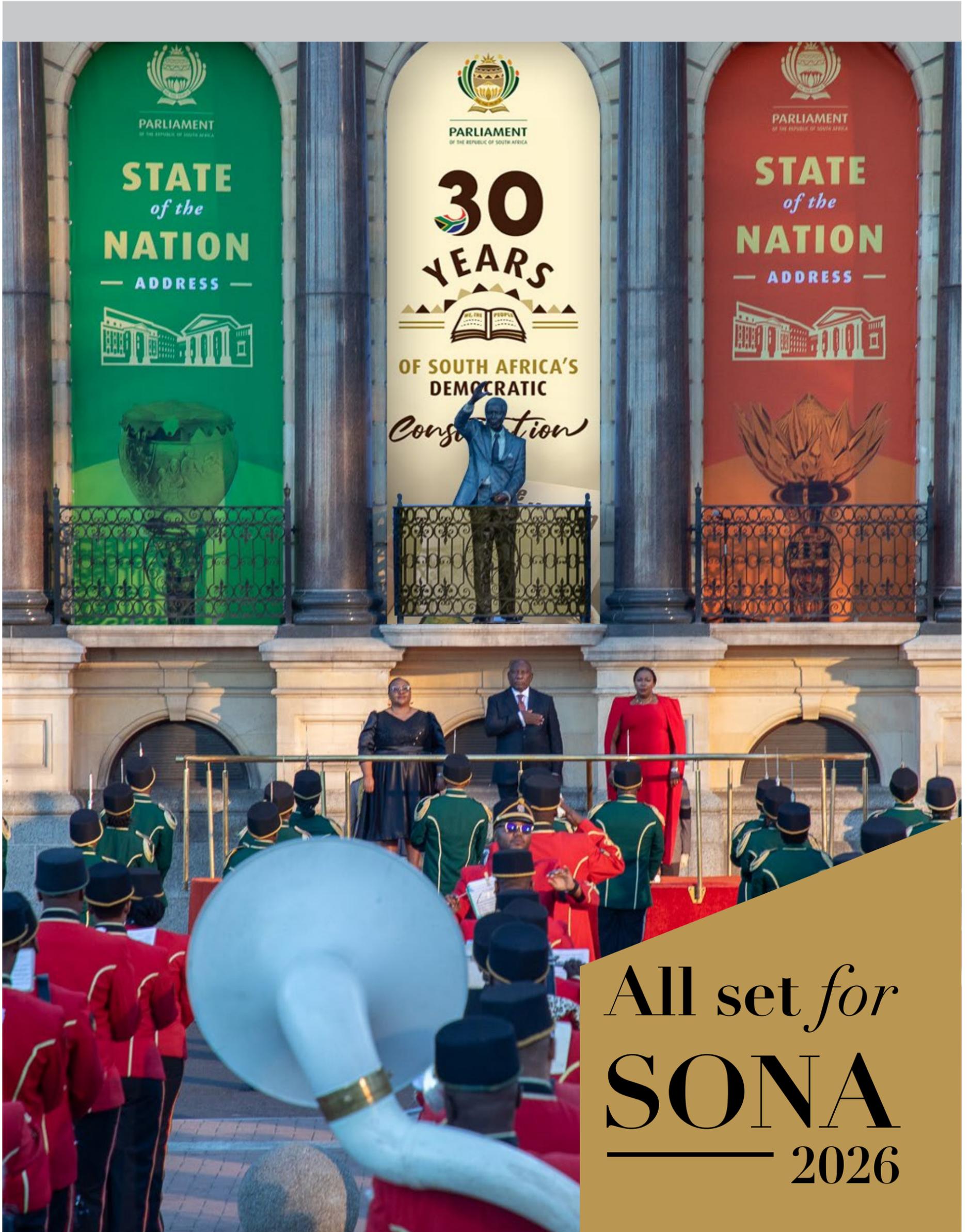


in session



All set for
SONA
2026

President Ramaphosa to Deliver State of the Nation Address at Cape Town City Hall

President Cyril Ramaphosa is set to deliver the 2026 State of the Nation Address (SONA) during a joint sitting of Parliament on Thursday, 12 February, at 7 pm, at Cape Town City Hall.



Since the City Hall has been declared part of the parliamentary precinct for the purpose of this sitting, all laws and joint rules applicable to Parliament will be enforced as if the sitting were held in the National Assembly Chamber. This designation aligns with Section 2 of the Powers, Privileges and Immunities of Parliament and Provincial Legislatures Act, which defines the precincts of Parliament.

Attendance and Seating Arrangements

The joint sitting will see all attendees, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and invited guests, physically present in the chamber and public gallery. Approximately 490 MPs and representatives from the South African Local Government Association will be accommodated on the chamber floor, while 263

invited guests representing various sectors of society will be seated in the public gallery.

Purpose and Format of SONA

The State of the Nation Address is convened by the President in terms of the Constitution to provide the nation with an update on government commitments and to outline the programme of action for the new financial year. It is a

joint sitting of the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), presided over by the Speaker of the NA and the Chairperson of the NCOP. The President's address is the sole item on the agenda.

Following the address, MPs will engage in a two-day debate during a joint sitting. The debate will be concluded with the President's reply on the third day. SONA will be broadcast live on radio and television,

and streamed online via Parliament's website, YouTube channel, and DSTv channel 408.

Ceremonial Features

This year's SONA will follow the full ceremonial format, featuring traditional activities such as:

- A 21-gun salute
- An aircraft flypast
- The ceremonial guard and salute of the step guard



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OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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OUR IDEALS

Vision

An activist and responsive people's Parliament that improves the quality of life of South Africans and ensures enduring equality in our society.

- Strategic Objectives
- Strengthening oversight and accountability;
- enhancing public involvement; deepening engagement in international fora;
- strengthening cooperative government;
- strengthening legislative capacity.

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- The singing of the national anthem by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) military band
- Processions involving provincial Speakers, Premiers, members of the judiciary, the Deputy President and the President

The President will observe the national anthem, performed by the SANDF military band, from a platform set up in front of the statue of Nelson Mandela on the City Hall balcony. This will be synchronised with the 21-gun salute and the flypast.

Cultural Significance of the Imbongi

The inclusion of an imbongi (praise singer) has been a significant feature of SONA since 1994, symbolising the celebration of South Africa's cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion. The imbongi is selected in

collaboration with provincial legislatures, with the language of the praise song determined on a rotational basis to ensure equal representation of all official languages.

This year's SONA promises to reflect not only on the progress made by the government but also on the rich cultural heritage and traditions that unite South Africa as a nation.

Your guide to the 2026 State of the Nation Address

The State of the Nation Address (SONA) is called in terms of Section 42(5) of the Constitution by the President of the Republic. It is a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament and one of the rare occasions that bring together the three arms of the state under one roof.

SONA provides the President

with an opportunity to speak to the nation on the general state of South Africa, to reflect on a wide range of political, economic and social matters within the domestic and global contexts, to account to the nation on the work of government and to set out government's programme of action. Traditionally, the President makes key government announcements during this important joint sitting of Parliament.

It is a ceremonial joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament, called specifically for the President to deliver his SONA and no other business may be considered on this day.

SONA usually takes place during February and is presided over by the Speaker and/or the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, by arrangement between them. During the week following the SONA, a debate of approximately two days

is held on the SONA. The President is then given an opportunity to reply to the debate on the third day and to close the debate. The SONA is one of the major general debates of the parliamentary year.

The President delivers his SONA before Parliament because Parliament is charged with ensuring that the work flowing from this Address is implemented. Most importantly, SONA is delivered in Parliament because the priorities pronounced in it have budgetary implications demanding robust oversight – one of Parliament's constitutional responsibilities.

Parliament may accept, reject or amend the allocation of budgets to government departments to ensure that these are in line with national priorities as outlined in the SONA. Parliament may also withhold the budgets of departments whose annual

performance plans are not in line with these priorities.

The sitting is referred to as the State of the Nation Address to distinguish it from the Opening of Parliament Address. The Opening of Parliament takes place at the start of a new five-year term of Parliament.

How is the Joint Sitting to deliver SONA convened?

Section 84(2)(d) of the Constitution provides that the President may summon the National Assembly, the National Council of Provinces, or Parliament to an extraordinary sitting to conduct special business. Joint Rule 7(1)(a) provides that the President may call a joint sitting of the Houses when it is necessary for the President to deliver the annual or a special address to Parliament.

What are the Ceremonial Events for SONA?

The official programme usually begins with three processions. There is the procession of provincial

Speakers, provincial Premiers, and the judiciary proceeding to the Chamber through the main door.

There is the arrival of the presidential cavalcade in the parliamentary precinct. The President alights, is welcomed by the Presiding Officers and their deputies, and proceeds to the Chamber for the Address. The aides-de-camp lead the presidential procession (see Aides-de-camp below).

Aides-de-camp

As the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, aides-de-camp are attached to the President of the Republic of South Africa at all ceremonies of the state. Their role in the country is limited to ceremonial duties. Once this task has been fulfilled, they are immediately withdrawn.

During the SONA, they travel with the President from President's place of residence to Parliament.

The aides-de-camp lead the presidential procession onto a saluting dais, on the steps of the National Assembly,

to receive the ceremonial honours, the guard of honour by the National Ceremonial Guard, the 21-gun salute, the national anthem and a salute flight. They then lead the procession into the Chamber and stand guard at the entrance of the Chamber.

21-gun salute

In 1842, the 21-gun salute became the international norm as one of the highest honours a nation rendered. It is fired in honour of the President. The first shot of the salute is synchronised to coincide with the singing of the national anthem. The salute takes one minute and 40 seconds.

In the Chamber

Members of both Houses must be seated before the procession enters. Each of the nine provinces is represented by its full quota of six permanent and four rotating members. A delegation of 10 South African Local Government Association members also take their seats in Chamber.

The Presiding Officers and the President enter the Chamber in procession,

preceded by the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod and followed by the Secretary to Parliament.

Imbongi

One of the important elements of the SONA since the birth of South Africa's democracy is imbongi, the praise singer. Imbongi praise singing gives Africanness pride of place –narrating the President's personal history, clan and family lineage in song, dance and narration. Imbongi starts this narration as the presidential procession enters the Chamber.

Serjeant-at-Arms and Usher of the Black Rod
The Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod are responsible for compliance with security policy in and around the Chamber and galleries, and implement related instructions from the Speaker, the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces and other presiding officers. They also perform ceremonial functions, including leading the procession into the Chamber at the start of proceedings.

The Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod lead the President and the Presiding Officers to their seats and proceed to place the Mace and the Black Rod in their designated positions before the Speaker and the Chairperson of the NCOP, respectively.

Mace and Black Rod

The Mace is a symbol of authority of the Speaker of the National Assembly. When the Serjeant-at-Arms carries the Mace into the debating chamber and places it before the Speaker of the National Assembly, it means that the National Assembly is formally in session and that its proceedings are official.

The Mace was designed to reflect the history, traditions, and diverse cultures and languages of South Africa. The design also celebrates the country's natural beauty, its plant and animal life and its rich mineral resources. The shape of the mace recalls the knobkerrie, an African symbol of defence as well as authority and leadership. Gold symbolises not only our country's natural wealth, but also the indigenous knowledge of Africa and the ancient African gold mining traditions of Mapungubwe.

The Black Rod is the symbol of the authority of the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). The Black Rod reflects the important role of the provinces in the functioning of the NCOP. When the Usher of the Black Rod carries the Black Rod into the debating chamber, and places it before the Chairperson of the NCOP, it means that the NCOP is formally in session and that its proceedings are official.



The shape of the Black Rod is in the form of a knobkerrie, an African symbol of defence, of authority and leadership. The protea, at the head of the Black Rod, is South Africa's national flower, and symbolises national pride. The beadwork reflects South Africa's diverse people and its rich cultural heritage. The clasping hands in gold symbolises freedom, peace and cooperation.

The black rod stands in a drum when the council is

in session. The drum is an expression of the African tradition of drums calling people to gather and speak. It is also symbolic of our achievement of democracy through dialogue.

Start of Proceedings

The Presiding Officer, while standing, bows to the left and then to the right in greeting and requests a moment of silence for prayer or meditation. Once everyone is seated, the

Presiding Officer reads out the notice calling the joint sitting and calls on the President to deliver his or her Address to the joint sitting.

As the joint sitting is called specifically for the President to deliver his SONA, no other business may be considered on this day.

Members of all parties have an opportunity to express themselves on the SONA during a full two-day debate in the week following the

SONA. On the third day, the President has an opportunity to reply to the debate and close the debate.

The Joint Rules concerning the order in joint sittings and the rules of debate apply to the SONA. Joint Rule also further provides that when the Houses sit jointly, the Assembly Rules on discipline remain applicable to Assembly members and the Council Rules on discipline remain applicable to a Council member.

On the conclusion of the President's speech, the Presiding Officer adjourns the sitting. Members are required to wait while the procession leaves the Chamber.

Media

Broadcast and photographic opportunities are also provided to the media inside and outside of the Chamber. 🗣️

Northern Cape Poet to Praise the President at 2026 State of the Nation Address

The imbongi who will sing the praises of President Cyril Ramaphosa before he delivers the 2026 State of the Nation Address before a joint sitting of Parliament on 12 February is Northern Cape poet Ms Ria Reen.

Ms Reen is a passionate poet, translator and a social linguist enthusiast, deeply rooted in her San and Khoe heritage. Hailing from Platfontein in the Northern Cape, Ria is committed to preserving and promoting indigenous languages and cultural identity.

Her powerful voice resonates with a profound understanding of her community and a dedication to giving them a platform.

Ria's poetic journey began in 2023 with her debut poem, 'Who I've Been', a powerful exploration of identity and heritage. Since then, she has become actively involved with Youth@Heart, using her poetry and spoken word to inspire and empower young

people.

Her work is driven by a mission to amplify the voices within her community, addressing themes of cultural identity, language preservation and social justice.

Ria is a dedicated advocate for her community, using her talents in poetry and public speaking to uplift and empower others. Her commitment to preserving indigenous languages and promoting cultural identity makes her a valuable asset in promoting cultural heritage and youth development.

Ria has performed at Wildebees Kraal Rock Arts Site in Platfontein, at

the Kimberley McGregor Museum, the Kimberley City Hall (United Democratic

Front's 40th anniversary) and she also voiced an audio book Dantagos, which will

be published soon. 🗣️



Dear Mr President . . .

InSession magazine asked South Africans what they would like to hear from the President in his State of the National Address. This is what they had to say.



Mr Sydwel Duli

In his 1919 poem *Second Coming*, William Butler Yeats made this poetic observation: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre, The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." President Cyril Ramaphosa first delivered the State of the Nation Address in February 2018 under his *Thuma Mina* slogan.

South Africans listened with great enthusiasm and optimism from his first SONA in February 2018. He promised difference at all respects, unity of the nation and development including economic growth. Now the falcon cannot hear the falconer, things fall apart.

We are hoping that he will address the nation on how his coalition government puts things together, the crumbling nation and economy, worst of all. The economy of the country doesn't cope with the population growth. That is terrible. We want answers from him.



Dr Asher Saks

Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, please, the Republic needs stronger leadership from the Presidency than ever before. Things are falling apart as if there is no one leading from the front. Please tighten the cooperation of the coalition government and see that cooperation translates in the delivery of basic services to the people.



Ms Nafiesa Souls

I wish the President can commit himself to increase old age pension, especially to the old citizens. The Department of Social Development, which is responsible for social grants, does not rise to the occasion regarding the fast-growing needs of old citizens. That grant is overstretched as most of us are responsible for a lot of dependents that include our unemployed children and their children, who are our grandchildren.

Slow or no economic growth doesn't make sense to us who are under the siege of poverty daily. We urge Mr Ramaphosa to deliver a speech that will convey a message of hope to us. When the Government of National Unity (GNU) was established in 2024, we hoped that by virtue of being a multiparty government, there will be a meaningful change. But we become poorer day by day. Please, President, say something that will raise the hopes of the old citizens.



Mr Abdul Kader

My expectations are in reference to Chris Hani's speech before the first democratic elections. When asked how they will run this country, Chris says he wishes that the wealth of the country be equally generated. He does not want to envision anyone living in squatter camps or informal settlements. This was said 35 years ago but today it is worse than Hani had envisioned, with crime rates soaring.

I believe if we just stick to the principles and visions that Chris Hani had back then, I'm sure everyone who had fought for democracy and shared Hani's vision that everyone should be treated equally, have the same resources and receive the same quality of education will work harder to ensure it becomes a reality because it is what we all want.

Ms Marwaa Kappry

I would like for him to invest more money into sports for kids, especially our football. Our football is in disarray, more especially here in the Western Cape. Look out the corruption in the South African Football Association.

Keep the petrol price down, open up more spaces in schools for learners in the midst of everything that has been happening around the lack of space in schools.

I would like the government to invest more in social welfare and

development and look after our kids, look after old citizens, then we would be on the right track. Another pressing issue is the rising unemployment. Our children pass Grade 12 but they don't move to tertiary level, as there is not enough bursary assistance for post-school education especially for those from impoverished and underprivileged communities, so that they can make something of themselves and open doors for themselves and become successful.

Ndileka Tyatyega

Mr President, your government must stop the 18 to 35 age limit for job vacancies, especially where only grade 12 is the highest-grade requirement. In police and correctional services centres, for instance, requirements for consideration include an age limit of 35 years. Another stumbling block which makes employment for African children absolutely impossible is five years' experience.



Siphosethu Dingani

Please President, ensure that the Government of National Unity, which you lead turns the crumbling state of our public hospitals and infrastructure in the Eastern Cape around. The hospitals have become the symbols of hell. People have lost hope in them. Some people refuse to be taken to them.

King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo was forced by the crumbling state of the public hospitals in his kingdom to mobilise support from Israel and elsewhere in the world. The investigation, which is underway, according to the media to get to the root of the visit of the Israelites, is an absolute waste of resources that include time. It is a hullabaloo, to say the least.



Rev Thamsanqa Mdingi

Mr President, I commend your leadership and that of the GNU on several achievements that have contributed to stability and continuity during a pivotal period.

Your administration's sustained interventions to stabilise electricity supply through improved Eskom maintenance, regulatory reform and the expansion of private and renewable generation under Operation Vulindlela have seen the end of load shedding, restoring confidence among investors and providing relief to households. In addition, the continued protection of social grants, including the Social Relief of Distress grant, has remained a critical lifeline for millions of South Africans facing economic hardship.

Your visible and consistent commitment to combating corruption also merits recognition. The work arising from the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations



of State Capture, together with the strengthening of institutions, such as the National Prosecuting Authority, the Special Investigating Unit and the Investigating Directorate Against Corruption, as well as the continuing work of the Madlanga Commission, have all signalled a clear stance that corruption will not be tolerated. While the

process of accountability is ongoing, the restoration of institutional independence and the pursuit of complex corruption cases have laid an important foundation for rebuilding public trust. Equally commendable, Mr President, is your principled approach to international relations, marked by South Africa's commitment to multilateralism, peaceful

dialogue and strategic non-alignment. Your engagement through the African Union, BRICS, G20 and other global platforms, as well as efforts to promote peace and dialogue in international conflicts, have reinforced South Africa's standing as a credible and respected voice in global affairs.

As the nation looks ahead, it would also be important to include in your 2026 address the GNU's commitment to confront the challenges that persist. Key amongst these challenges is the high rate of unemployment, particularly among young people, as this continues to limit economic inclusion and social mobility.

Mr President, the country needs to hear very clearly your government's commitment and clear action plan to end gender-based violence, violent crimes, especially against women and children, and a continued effort to end corruption. Weak service delivery at municipal level also requires increased effort and attention.

It is my sincere hope that the 2026 SONA will both affirm the progress achieved under your leadership and set out clear, time-bound commitments to addressing the nation's enduring challenges.



Mr Ebrahim Harris

We are expecting the President to tell the nation honestly in his State of the Nation Address, the government's practical hope to turn the shrinkage of the economy to growth, even if it is slow growth. We are told about 1% slow growth rate, yet from our simple observation the word growth does not apply to the state of the South African economy.

The vocabulary to be used in defining the state of the South African economy should be decline or shrinkage.

We are expecting his address to be more on plans to win the hearts and minds of investors. Investors are willing to invest but just need his government to mobilise to make that possible. Things are falling apart as the economy is dying. The poor will be listening to his plans in the area of economic growth to create employment. Please don't disappoint the poor, Mr President.



Speaker Didiza: Sona Is Parliament's Ultimate Mechanism For Holding The Executive To Account

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thoko Didiza, has described the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) as the highest formal expression of executive accountability to the people of South Africa. She made these remarks during a media briefing on Parliament's readiness to host the 2026 SONA.

Ms Didiza explained that this accountability is exercised through Parliament, with SONA serving as the anchor for parliamentary oversight. "It is the moment when the President accounts to the nation on progress made, outlines priorities for the year ahead and presents government's programme of action," she said. "These

commitments become the benchmark against which Parliament measures executive performance through committee oversight."

The SONA is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 12 February, at Cape Town City Hall. Ms Didiza confirmed that the budget for the

2026 SONA is approximately R7 million. The Secretary to Parliament, Mr Xolile George, noted that a significant portion of the budget has been allocated to the ICT infrastructure required to manage an event of such scale and logistical complexity.

Ms Didiza further revealed

that former Presidents Kgalema Motlanthe and Jacob Zuma have confirmed their attendance, while an apology has been received from former President Thabo Mbeki.

"Some elements should remain a surprise, particularly regarding attendance at SONA. We

invited all former Presidents, but responses are not always received in time, and some may change their minds at the last minute," she said.

She added that Parliament hopes this will be the final occasion on which SONA is hosted at City Hall, although this remains uncertain due to the unpredictability surrounding the hosting of state functions.

"This year, 2026, also marks the 30th anniversary of South Africa's Constitution, adopted in 1996. This milestone invites reflection on our democratic journey and a renewed commitment to the constitutional values of dignity, equality, freedom and accountability that continue to guide our work as a democratic legislature," Ms Didiza said.

"SONA 2026 is more than a ceremonial occasion. It reaffirms Parliament's constitutional mandate to hold the executive to account, to legislate in the public interest, to facilitate meaningful public participation, and to serve as a platform for national dialogue."

She emphasised that Parliament is operationally ready and institutionally focused on ensuring that SONA sets the tone for a year of intensified oversight and responsive service delivery.

The SONA debate the following week will take place at the recently handed-over Dome on 16 and 17 February. Ms Didiza also announced that Parliament will host the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, an event that reinforces South Africa's role in global parliamentary diplomacy and international democratic dialogue. 🇿🇦



Dome Handover marks key step in Parliament's Renewal following 2022 fire



In a recent official handover ceremony, Parliament was pleased to accept the refurbished Dome from the Minister Public Works and Infrastructure, Mr Dean Macpherson, who said the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is working with Parliament to keep South Africa's constitutional democracy alive and enable Parliament to continue Its work.

The handover marks a significant milestone in Parliament's recovery, resilience and renewal efforts following the 2022 fire that damaged parts of the parliamentary precinct, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thoko Didiza, said. "The project reflects a collaborative partnership

between Parliament and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to deliver a functional, secure and fit-for-purpose parliamentary facility, capable of supporting Parliament in fulfilling its constitutional obligations to the people of South Africa," said Ms Didiza.

With the major refurbishment work concluded, the Dome officially becomes part of the parliamentary precinct once again. As such, the provisions of the Powers and Privileges of Parliament and Provincial Legislatures Act now apply to the facility, restoring the full

authority, protection and operational status required for parliamentary sittings and proceedings.

The handover also enables Parliament to proceed with the final phase of technical readiness. "This includes the installation and commissioning of audio-

visual and broadcasting infrastructure, ICT systems and official parliamentary branding to ensure the Dome is fully operational for sittings of the National Assembly and other parliamentary business," she said.

The Dome will serve as

a secure, fit-for-purpose and dignified temporary home for the National Assembly at a time when Parliament must continue to discharge its constitutional responsibilities without interruption. "We are pleased that the views and concerns raised by Members of Parliament regarding the need to ensure appropriate technical and structural enhancements to the Dome were carefully considered and addressed as part of the refurbishment process," Speaker Didiza said.

Following approval in September 2024, the Dome was installed as a state-owned, reusable facility designed to host National Assembly sittings, joint sittings and other high-level national events throughout the reconstruction period.

The Speaker continued: "We commend a close cooperation between Parliament and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure that is supported by the Joint Standing Committee on the

Financial Management of Parliament, in delivering the project on time and within a constrained fiscal environment."

A key success of the project was the process of scope rationalisation and value engineering, which reduced tenant fit-out costs by more than R8 million while preserving all core functionality and ensuring statutory compliance. This reflects a responsible stewardship of public funds.

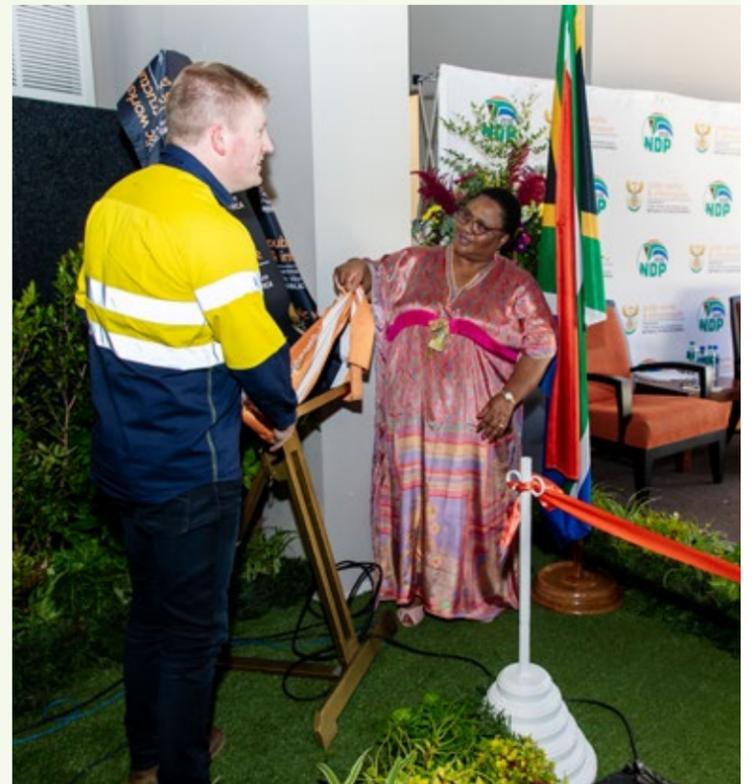
The Dome represents a cost-effective and strategic investment for the State. Hiring external venues for parliamentary sittings is projected to cost an estimated R48 million per year, with no residual value, while the Dome represents a once-off investment and remains a reusable national asset for future parliamentary and state use.

Beyond cost considerations, the Dome ensures continuity of constitutional processes, reduces reliance on external venues, strengthens

government resilience in hosting high-level national events, and provides a secure, acoustically equipped environment designed specifically for parliamentary work.

The timing of the handover is significant, as the Dome will host key events in February 2026, including National Assembly sittings, the debate on the State of the Nation Address, the President's reply to the debate, and the National Budget Speech.

These are cornerstone moments in South Africa's democratic calendar. The delivery of this facility ensures that they will take place in a venue that reflects dignity, functionality and institutional continuity. The refurbished Dome symbolises Parliament's resilience and adaptability, and demonstrates that even after significant disruption, democratic institutions can recover, reconfigure and continue to serve the people of South Africa with strength and purpose. 🇿🇦





OUR SOUTH AFRICA – THE SUN

The sun heals the divisions of the past, improves the quality of life of all South Africans, frees the potential of each person and builds a united and democratic South Africa, taking its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.



OUR PEOPLE – THE PROTEA LEAVES

Our people, building on the foundation of a democratic and open society, freely elect representatives, acting as a voice of the people and providing a national forum for public consideration of issues.



OUR PARLIAMENT – THE DRUM

The drum calls the people's Parliament, the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, to consider national and provincial issues, ensuring government by the people under the Constitution.



OUR CONSTITUTION – THE BOOK

Our Constitution lays the foundation for a democratic and open society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. It is the supreme law of our country, and ensures government by the people.