



**OPENING OF PARLIAMENT ADDRESS
BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA**

**18 JULY 2024
CAPE TOWN CITY HALL**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Thoko Didiza,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane,
Deputy President Paul Mashatile,
Former President Thabo Mbeki,
Former Deputy President and Former Speaker Baleka Mbete,
Former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Former Chairperson of the NCOP Amos Masondo,
Chief Justice Raymond Zondo,
Deputy Chief Justice Mandisa Maya,
Executive Mayor of Cape Town, Geordin Hill-Lewis,
Heads of Institutions Supporting Democracy,
Esteemed Member of the Order of Ikhamanga, Dr Esther Mahlangu,
Distinguished Guests and Eminent Persons,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Honourable Members of Parliament,

Fellow South Africans,

We gather here in the province of the Western Cape in the aftermath of ferocious and unforgiving storms that caused damage to homes, businesses and infrastructure, affecting tens of thousands of people across the province.

In recent days, we have witnessed runaway fires in KwaZulu-Natal, in which 14 people, including six firefighters, lost their lives. The fires also caused the destruction of homes, livestock and grazing land.

The thoughts of all South Africans are with all those people who have been subjected to these terrible weather conditions as they work to recover and rebuild.

Honourable Members,

I have asked the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces to convene this joint sitting to formally open Parliament on a day that is full of meaning and significance.

Today, we celebrate the birth of the founding father of our nation and a global icon of peace, justice and reconciliation, President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

Across our country and across the world, millions of people are marking this day with deeds of service and solidarity.

Through their actions they are giving life to a fundamental truth: that we derive our humanity from the humanity of others.

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Motho ke motho ka batho.

Muthu ndi muthu nga vhangwe vhathu. Munhu yi munhu yi vanhu.

We are reminded on this day that we have a responsibility to each other; and that our wellbeing and our happiness cannot be separated from those of our fellow woman and man.

We are reminded that as we strive to progress and to prosper, we have a responsibility to ensure that no-one is left behind.

We South Africans are a diverse nation, with different histories, beliefs, cultures and languages.

Yet we are one people. And we share a common destiny.

It is this common destiny that the people of South Africa have charged this Parliament and this Government to consolidate and advance.

Exactly 50 days ago, the people of South Africa went to the polls to decide the future of our country. Ahead of the elections they had expressed their concerns and their hopes, their wishes and their expectations.

Through their votes, they determined that the leaders of our country should set aside their political differences and come together as one to overcome the severe challenges that confront our nation.

They sent a clear message that without unity, cooperation and partnership, our efforts to end poverty, unemployment and inequality will not succeed.

Guided by this directive from the people, political parties from across the political spectrum have elected to establish a Government of National Unity.

In an act that is unprecedented in our democratic history, ten political parties represented here in our Parliament have agreed to craft a common programme to build a better, more equal and more just South Africa.

They have come together, despite their differences, because they share a commitment to a nation that is united, prosperous and inclusive.

Through a Statement of Intent, the parties have made a firm commitment to respect the Constitution and the rule of law and to promote accountability, transparency, integrity and good governance.

They have agreed on a Minimum Programme as the foundation of the work of the Government of National Unity.

The priority actions that arise from this minimum programme received the full support of the recent Cabinet Lekgotla, which brought together newly-appointed ministers, deputy ministers and premiers. Local government representatives, directors-general and other key officials were also in attendance.

These are the priority actions that we outline this evening.

Cabinet will be convening a further strategy session to consider the Medium-Term Development Plan, which will translate these priorities into a detailed plan and interventions that government will implement over the next five years.

The Medium-Term Development Plan will set out a well-defined vision and strategic plan that outlines clear goals and includes specific, measurable objectives and a roadmap for achieving them. These goals will be properly aligned with the Budget, which will support the implementation of these objectives.

In all this work, the National Development Plan Vision 2030 remains the defining blueprint for our country's growth and development.

We will also draw inspiration from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063 in crafting our Medium-Term Development Plan.

The Cabinet Lekgotla underscored the determination of all members of the Government of National Unity to work together to advance the interests of all South Africans.

It noted with appreciation the commitment and great enthusiasm with which the newly-appointed Ministers and Deputy Ministers as well as Premiers have embarked on their duties.

Fellow South Africans,

Despite the achievements of 30 years of democracy, and the work undertaken over the last five years to rebuild our economy and our society, millions of South Africans remain poor, unemployed and live in a highly unequal society.

For a decade and a half, our economy has barely grown.

The circumstances of the South African people today require that we act together as the Government of National Unity and all key role players in our country with great urgency, boldly and decisively.

The Government of National Unity has resolved to dedicate the next five years to actions that will advance three strategic priorities:

Firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation.

Secondly, to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.

Thirdly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

We have decided to place inclusive economic growth at the centre of the work of the Government of National Unity and at the top of the national agenda.

Our experience over the past 30 years has shown that when our economy grows, jobs are created. When our economy contracts there is no job creation and jobs are lost.

The Government of National Unity will pursue every action that contributes to sustainable, rapid economic growth and remove every obstacle that stands in the way of growth.

We are determined that growth must be inclusive. It must be transformational.

Inclusive growth must drive the redistribution of wealth and opportunity.

It must support the empowerment of black South Africans and women, and all those who in the past had been relegated to the fringes of the economy.

This is part of the constitutional imperative to redress the imbalances of the past and deal with the slow process of development.

Through empowerment and transformation, we can ensure that the skills, capabilities, resources and energies of all South Africans are used to the greatest effect.

We will continue to pursue programmes that encourage broad-based black economic empowerment, employment equity and support to small- and medium-sized enterprises.

We will continue to protect and uphold the hard-won rights of workers, and continually strive to improve the conditions in which they work and live.

Inclusive growth demands that we affirm the position of women and youth in the economy.

Inclusive growth requires that we remove the social, economic, cultural and other barriers to the full participation of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in the economy.

We will support the growth of rural enterprises and invest in public infrastructure in under-served areas.

We will increase funding to land reform, prioritise the transfer of state land and improve post-settlement support by strengthening the institutional capacity of responsible structures.

To achieve rapid, inclusive growth, we need to fix our struggling municipalities.

Growth happens at a local level, where people live and work.

Our municipalities must become both the providers of social services and facilitators of inclusive economic growth. They must work to attract investment.

This approach can encourage businesses to expand and create more jobs in municipal areas. Investors are attracted to areas with reliable and modern infrastructure.

Simplifying and speeding up planning and regulatory processes can make it easier for businesses to invest and operate in a municipality, thus creating more jobs.

As the national government, we have both a Constitutional responsibility and a clear electoral mandate to assist municipalities in the effective exercise of their powers and functions.

We will ensure that the institutional structure and funding model for local government is fit-for-purpose, and that municipalities are financially and operationally sustainable.

We will put in place systems to ensure that capable and qualified people are appointed to senior positions in municipalities, and ensure independent regulation and oversight of the appointment process.

As an immediate priority, we will bring stability to governance in our metros and restore the delivery of services.

We have already begun this work.

When I visited eThekweni earlier this year, I met with residents of the city, with local business leaders and municipal officials.

They told me that they wanted to work together to build a city that they could be proud of again.

We have since put in place the eThekweni Presidential Working Group to enhance support from national and provincial government to turn the Metro administration around, to fix the problems in water and sanitation and attract new investment.

We will extend the same approach to other metropolitan cities that face serious challenges so that our cities can be engines of growth and dynamic centres of opportunity.

In the next five years, working together, drawing on our collective capabilities, we will forge a new inclusive growth path for South Africa by pursuing a massive investment in infrastructure.

Significant projects are underway around the country in areas such as transport, roads, water, energy and human settlements.

We will massively increase the scale of investment in infrastructure through a more holistic and integrated approach, positioning Infrastructure South Africa as the central institution of coordination and planning.

We are simplifying the regulations on public-private partnerships to enable greater investment in both social and economic infrastructure development.

From our largest metros to our deepest rural areas, we have a clear intention to turn our country into a construction site, as roads, bridges, houses, schools, hospitals and clinics are built, as broadband fibre is laid and as new power lines are installed.

We must work to engender a culture of maintenance of public infrastructure, and dedicate resources and establish systems to ensure this.

As the Government of National Unity, we are resolved to intensify our investment drive, encouraging and enabling businesses to invest in productive capacity.

These investments will lead to increased employment creation for unemployed South Africans especially for young people.

We will drive growth in labour-intensive sectors such as services, agriculture, green manufacturing and tourism.

To create more jobs for South Africans, we will focus on processing our minerals so that we export finished products rather than raw commodities.

We will pursue a smart industrial policy that focuses on the competitiveness of our economy, and that incentivises businesses to expand our exports and create jobs.

We will continue to work with stakeholders to develop and implement Master Plans to grow important industries, increase investment, create jobs and foster transformation.

We are convinced that small businesses and the informal sector hold the greatest potential for inclusive growth and job creation.

We will pay particular attention to supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises in townships and rural areas. We will take economic activity to where most of our people live so that more jobs can be created.

Red tape debilitates the creation of jobs. Every department and every public entity has been directed to reduce the undue regulatory burdens that hold back businesses from creating jobs.

We have demonstrated the value of public and social employment in creating immediate work and livelihood opportunities.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus, the Expanded Public Works Programme and other initiatives under the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention have provided income, work experience and skills development opportunities to many young unemployed people.

We will expand and institutionalise these programmes so that more and more young people can participate in job opportunities and skills development.

Through the Presidential Employment Stimulus, we have been able to create nearly 2 million work and livelihood opportunities. We aim to expand the public works programme exponentially to create more job opportunities.

We see great potential for growth beyond our borders.

As we strengthen economic diplomacy with our largest trading partners and potential trading partners, we will prioritise the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area to increase our exports to the rest of the continent.

We will do this as part of our foreign policy approach, which promotes peace, security, democracy and development across Africa and advances a more just and inclusive world order.

Over the next five years, we will seize the enormous opportunity in renewable energy for inclusive growth.

South Africa has some of the best solar and wind resources in the world.

As we undertake a just transition towards renewable energy, South Africa must create a green manufacturing sector centred on the export of green hydrogen and associated products, electric vehicles and renewable energy components.

We have seen, for example, how the Northern Cape has already attracted billions of rands of investment in renewable energy projects.

Work is underway to set up a Special Economic Zone in Boegoebaai to drive investment in green hydrogen energy projects.

We already have a huge pipeline of renewable energy projects, representing over 22,500 MW of new generating capacity, estimated to be worth around R400 billion in new private investment. Investments such as these will create many jobs.

Just this week, we saw the largest-ever private energy project connect to the grid near Lichtenburg in the North West, with over 390,000 solar panels that will add 256 MW to the grid.

We will see more of these projects taking shape across our country in the months and years to come. As these investments reach fruition more jobs will be created.

Our Just Energy Transition Investment Plan sets out a clear path to invest more than R1.5 trillion in a just transition, including support for workers and communities in Mpumalanga and other coal-producing regions.

South Africa is undergoing a renewable energy revolution that is expected to be the most significant driver of growth and job creation in the next decade and beyond.

We also have a unique opportunity to position our country as a major player in the digital economy and create jobs in digital services.

We will invest in digital identity and payments, expand access to affordable broadband, and increase training for young people in digital skills.

As we pursue these new areas of growth, we will continue with the far-reaching reforms that enable growth.

At the same time, we will launch the second phase of Operation Vulindlela, a government-wide initiative that has been essential in supporting and driving reform.

In its second phase, Operation Vulindlela will focus on reforming the local government system and improving the delivery of basic services, and harnessing digital public infrastructure as a driver of growth and inclusion.

It will also focus on accelerating the release of public land for social housing and redirecting our housing policy to enable people to find affordable homes in areas of their choice.

We will complete the most consequential transformation of South Africa's electricity industry in more than a century.

Since the announcement of the Energy Action Plan in July 2022, we have made tremendous progress in reducing the severity of load shedding.

Over the next five years, government will focus on expanding and strengthening the transmission network.

To drive inclusive growth, we need an efficient freight rail network to carry our minerals, agricultural produce and manufactured goods to market.

Through the implementation of the Freight Logistics Roadmap, we will continue with reforms to transform South Africa's freight logistics system.

The work we are doing with business and unions through the National Logistics Crisis Committee has already contributed to improvements in the operational performance of freight rail and ports.

The well-being of our people and the growth of our economy depends on the availability of water.

South Africa is a water-scarce country, and our water security is threatened by historical underinvestment in bulk water resources and distribution infrastructure.

We will therefore continue with institutional reforms in the water sector to enable greater investment in bulk water infrastructure and better regulation of water services across the country.

Just as businesses need water and electricity to operate, a growing economy needs skills.

Where the skills we need are not immediately available, we need to attract people with the appropriate qualifications and experience.

We will continue with the visa reforms introduced in the last few years to attract skills and investment and grow the tourism sector.

We will continue to pursue a macroeconomic policy that supports growth and development, in a stable and sustainable manner.

Like many other nations, we have had to borrow money to support our budgetary requirements.

We will manage public finances with a view to stabilising debt. We are firmly committed to steadily reducing the cost of servicing our debt so that we can redirect funds towards other critical social and economic needs.

Our second strategic priority as the Government of National Unity is to tackle poverty and the high cost of living.

An effective, integrated and comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy is necessary to provide protection and support to the most vulnerable in society.

Even at a time when many companies are making large profits, millions of South Africans are suffering as a result of rising prices.

As the Government of National Unity, we will look to expand the basket of essential food items exempt from VAT and undertake a comprehensive review of administered prices, including the fuel price formula, to identify areas where prices can be reduced.

Asset poverty is one of the underlying causes of abject poverty, which exacerbates the high cost of living amongst our people.

The provision of title deeds for land and subsidised housing provides people with assets that they can use to improve their economic position.

Income poverty is also one of the underlying causes of poverty.

The best way to deal with poverty is for people to have jobs. We have however made interventions to support the unemployed through a variety of interventions including during Covid when we introduced the SRD Grant.

The SRD Grant has provided a lifeline to millions of unemployed people.

We will use this grant as a basis for the introduction of a sustainable form of income support for unemployed people to address the challenge of income poverty.

We must ensure that local governments properly implement the indigent policy so that the old, the infirm and the poor are able to get assistance with the payment of basic services.

Importantly, we will link social assistance with other forms of support to lift people out of poverty.

As a country, we need to appreciate the impact that a well-functioning and quality education system has on both reducing poverty and driving inclusive economic growth.

We will therefore focus on achieving universal access to early childhood development, which is a prerequisite for improved learning in later years.

We will ensure schools are conducive to education, with enough classrooms, safe and appropriate sanitation facilities, clean water and a daily meal for those who need it.

To ensure that we produce the skills that our economy needs, we will expand vocational and technical training in schools and post-school institutions, and take a demand-led approach to skills development.

An important task of the next five years is to ensure that we also reduce the high cost of living through ensuring that everyone in South Africa has equal access to equitable, accessible and affordable quality health care.

As we implement the National Health Insurance, we will focus on strengthening health care infrastructure, improving training of health care personnel and using technology to improve health care management.

While there is much contestation around the NHI, there is broad agreement that we must draw on the resources and capabilities of both the public and private sectors to meet the health care needs of all South Africans equally.

In implementing the NHI, we are confident that we will be able to bring stakeholders together, and that we will be able to resolve differences and clarify misunderstandings.

With so many people living far from economic opportunities and services, transport costs take up a large part of people's income and drive up the cost of living.

An immediate priority is therefore to complete the recovery of the passenger rail network across the country to enable people to travel from outlying areas to city centres.

Around 80 percent of commuter rail corridors are now back in operation, and nearly 300 vandalised stations have been refurbished, providing safer and more efficient services to commuters.

The third strategic priority of the Government of National Unity is to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

We will proceed with the work already underway to professionalise the public service, ensuring that we attract into the state people with skills, capabilities and integrity.

We will continue to fight corruption and prevent undue political interference in the administration of the state.

In this administration, we will complete the work to restore the financial position and operational performance of our state-owned enterprises.

We will complete the implementation of a new centralised ownership model for SOEs. This will improve accountability, transparency, governance and oversight, while reducing inefficiency and the potential for corruption.

The establishment of a state-owned SOE holding company will give us greater capacity to build a sovereign wealth fund.

This has been done successfully by other countries whose sovereign wealth funds have built up capital from the high performance of the state owned enterprises rather than from the fiscus.

To tackle crime and corruption we must have capable, sophisticated and independent law enforcement agencies that can fight complex and organised crime.

We will deploy modern technology to assist crime fighting. A data-driven approach will be used to identify violent crime hotspots and inform the allocation of policing resources alongside prevention measures.

We will continue to tackle priority crimes like illegal mining, gang violence, cash-in-transit heists and the construction mafia through specialised police units.

We will continue to implement the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, and expand victim support services, like the Thuthuzela Centres and GBV desks in police stations.

Honourable Members,

Thirty years ago, President Nelson Mandela stood before this House to reflect on the first 100 days of the first Government of National Unity.

Recognising the different views of the diverse parties within the government, he said:

“What brings us together is the overriding commitment to a joint national effort to reconcile our nation and improve its well-being.”

The same may be said of the Government of National Unity that has now been established by ten of the parties represented in this Parliament.

We share a commitment to reconcile our nation by advancing social justice and equal prosperity for all.

We are committed to improve the well-being of our country and its people through inclusive growth, the creation of jobs and the reduction of poverty.

This is an undertaking that involves us all.

On the occasion of the Presidential Inauguration, I made a commitment that we should work together to hold a National Dialogue to discuss the critical challenges facing our nation, and to agree on what we all need to do to achieve a better future for this great country.

Across society, people have expressed their support for this National Dialogue.

They have said it should involve all key stakeholders in the life of our country, representing civil society, traditional leaders, the faith-based sector, labour, business, cultural workers, sports people and other formations representing the diverse interests and voices of our citizens.

Following the example set by historic events, such as the Congress of the People in 1955, the Conference for a Democratic Future in 1989 and the CODESA talks in the early 1990s, and drawing on the experience of the writing of our new democratic constitution in 1996, we envisage a National Dialogue that involves extensive and inclusive public participation.

As we have done at many important moments in our history, we will seek to forge a common vision and build a comprehensive social compact with a clear programme of action to realise our aspirations for the country.

Through this National Dialogue, we are called to be agents of change, to be champions of inclusive growth, to be creators of opportunity.

A few years ago, a diverse group of partners and stakeholders from across society came together to consider various scenarios for the future of our country.

These were called the Indlulamithi Scenarios 2035.

One of the scenarios they described was called ‘The Recrimination Nation’, using the loud Hadedda bird as its symbol.

This described a situation of inaction, where our country’s problems go unresolved, and where everyone blames each other for South Africa’s ills. This scenario painted a picture of our country going into decline.

The second scenario, symbolised by a vulture, painted a picture of a desperate nation governed by a populist coalition whose main objective is self-enrichment and patronage.

This scenario saw investment confidence being eroded, the growth path being low and unemployment, poverty and inequality remaining extremely high.

They also described a scenario they called ‘The Cooperation Nation’, symbolised by the social weaver birds.

This scenario paints a picture where after disruptions and protests there is a coming together of political parties, the state, private sector and civil society in order to jointly identify priorities and leveraging the strength of each.

There is change in the form of governance and reform that leads to the economy growing, with more investment attracted, leading to the reduction of unemployment, inequality and poverty.

By establishing the Government of National Unity, by preparing for a National Dialogue, we have deliberately set ourselves along the path towards a 'cooperation nation'.

We would like all of us as South Africans to behave like 'weaver birds'. Weavers are among the most gregarious birds in that they build complex structures together and cooperate.

Despite all the challenges, despite our differences, despite all the headwinds, as South Africans we are called upon to remain firmly committed to pursue the path of cooperation, growth and inclusion.

Earlier today, a group of South African climbers reached the summit of Kilimanjaro, the highest peak on the African continent.

They did so in honour of the birth of Nelson Mandela and to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our freedom.

Known as Trek4Mandela expedition, these climbers have been joined by others from several countries around the world to help to keep girls in school by raising funds for sanitary products and other needs.

Let their actions inspire us all.

Let their achievement remind us that, as the South African nation, there is no mountain we cannot climb and no peak we cannot reach.

I conclude by remembering and paraphrasing the words of Martin Luther King Jr, when I say:

Let us rise up tonight with greater readiness.

Let us stand with a greater determination.

And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge, to make South Africa what it ought to be.

We have an opportunity to make South Africa a better nation.

May God bless South Africa and protect its people.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.

I thank you.