

JS 1 – 2026] THIRD SESSION, SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

OF

JOINT SITTING

THURSDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2026

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. [19:03] The President of the Republic delivered his address as follows:

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thoko Didiza; the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Ms Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane; former President Kgalema Motlanthe; former Chairperson of the NCOP, Mr Amos Masondo; former Chairperson of the NCOP, Dr Naledi Pandor; Mayor of Cape Town, Alderman Geordin Hill-Lewis ... he was nervous, he thought I would not be able to pronounce his first name, because it is wrongly spelled ... Deputy Chief Justice Dunstan Mlambo; Chairperson of the National House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders, Kgosi Thabo Seatlholo; Isithwalandwe, [highest honour awarded] Ms Sophie de Bruyn; President of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa, Contralesa, Kgoshi Mathupa Mokoena; Members of Parliament, premiers of our provinces, fellow South Africans, 70 years ago, thousands of

women of all races marched to the union buildings, their hearts beating with a common purpose. Armed with extraordinary cunning and resolve, these women braved police checkpoints and harassment.

In a voice loud and clear, they said, we shall not rest until we have won for our children their fundamental rights of freedom, justice, and security. We recall the powerful image of Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Sophie de Bruyn and Rahima Moosa, carrying armfuls of petitions to lay at the doorstep of a Prime Minister who did not dare to meet them. Every petition they handed over carried the weight of justice. Each of the 100 000 signatures they had collected expressed a desire for freedom and equality.

For 30 minutes, the 20 000 women stood on the steps of the amphitheatre of the Union Buildings in silence, not singing, not moving, not speaking. The powerful imagery of these women standing in silence illustrated their resolve and their commitment to bringing about change. Their silence reflected the deep emotional pain and frustration born out of systemic apartheid oppression. Their silence showcased the sorrow and the anger that they felt in their fight for justice and equality. Their silence was long enough to be unsettling to the apartheid officials who were watching them. In that quiet moment, they showed the world that it is not the shouts of anger, but the stillness of determination that moves mountains.

After the silence came the singing of the now eternally famous chant that has gone down in our struggle history, symbolising the powerful role played by women in the struggle against apartheid. They chanted, “Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo.” Translated, it means, you strike a woman, you strike a rock. It is said that the women’s chant rolled down the terraces of the Union Buildings, turning the seat of state power into a stage of protest, where courage meets authority.

This evening, we are honoured to have among us Mama Sophie de Bruyn, one of the leaders who marched, and a stalwart of our struggle for freedom. She and many other women who have made enormous sacrifices in our struggle for freedom remind us that women have always been at the forefront of change, ready to stand up, to be counted, to speak out and never back down in the fight for justice.

To mark this anniversary, I ask you to rise and give a standing ovation to the women of South Africa who marched on the Union Buildings in 1956.

Mama Sophie de Bruyn, I can see where you are seated. Please, stand up, so that we can see you.

It was 50 years ago, in that same spirit of defiance and struggle, that young people in Soweto walked out of school and marched towards Orlando Stadium, to oppose the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and the hated system of Bantu Education. Their courage in the face of a brutally oppressive regime reverberated around the world and brought renewed attention to our struggle. The determination and sacrifices of the youth of 1976 and of the generations of young people

that would follow continue to inspire us. We thank the young people of 1976.

Thirty years ago, in 1996, in the very precinct of the Houses of Parliament, the Constitutional Assembly adopted the text on which our democratic nation is founded. Our Constitution reflects the spirit of those women who marched in 1956, the young people of 1976 and the many South Africans from all walks of life who fought for our freedom.

It is a Constitution that reflects the aspirations of the people of South Africa as a nation that is united and at peace - a nation that has thrown off the shackles of oppression and a divided past. It is a Constitution that calls on us not only to redress the injustices of the past, but also to progressively realise the right of all South Africans to housing, health, food, water, social security, education and a better and prosperous life for all.

Today, we must realise these aspirations in a world that is rapidly changing, a world in which narrow self-interest has replaced the common good, a world in which trade is used as an instrument of coercion, a world in which might is right and the powerful impose themselves on the weak.

To navigate this new world, we must draw on our strength as a nation. Our strength comes from our values, as articulated in our Constitution - the values of dignity and equality, of nonracialism and nonsexism, diversity and of the inherent worth of every person.

It comes from our people. Our strength comes from our people, from our tolerance, generosity, kindness and solidarity. It comes from our steadfast commitment to upholding the rights and affirming the dignity of people in our society who face prejudice and discrimination, including persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Our strength comes from our determination and resolve. It comes from our creativity and inspiration.

As we navigate this new world, we must rely on that strength that comes from our natural endowments, from the minerals in our earth and the richness of our soil, from the beauty of our mountains and shores.

Our strength comes from our institutions, which are robust and independent, and from the spirit of democracy and freedom that lives deep within all of us. Our strength and power come from one another. It comes from what we can achieve when we work together. Our strength also comes from our respect for one another, even as we may differ on various issues.

Our strength also comes from our sporting men and women who continue to lift the South African flag on the world stage and bring glory to our nation.

As we reflect on the state of our nation, we can say that we are stronger today than we were a year ago. Our economy is growing again, and this growth is gathering pace. While we have experienced four consecutive quarters of GDP growth, we know that it has to grow much higher and much faster to meet our social and economic challenges.

We have achieved two consecutive primary budget surpluses. Our credit rating has improved, interest rates are coming down, and inflation is at its lowest level in 20 years. We are on a clear path of stabilising our national debt. The rand has strengthened against the dollar.

The Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the largest stock exchange on the African continent, has performed exceptionally well over the past year. This growth reflects broader economic recovery, investor confidence and increasing interest in South Africa's economy and equities. Our borrowing costs have been declining.

Through Operation Vulindlela, we have made significant progress in accelerating economic reform and opening the way for investment and competition.

We have brought an end to load shedding and built a more dynamic and resilient energy system.

We have made progress in improving the performance of our ports and freight rail lines, steadily increasing the volume of goods that we move in and out of our country.

We have restored our passenger rail system. More and more commuters are now able to travel to work on new locally made trains, significantly reducing their transport costs.

We are investing across our country in roads, bridges, rail lines, ports, dams and solar farms.

We have created over 2,5 million opportunities through the Presidential Employment Stimulus, mainly for young people and women.

The Expanded Public Works Programme and the Community Work Programme continue to offer job opportunities to many throughout our country.

Last year, we saw the highest matric pass rate in our history with more than two-thirds of all bachelor passes coming from schools in the most disadvantaged communities.

As the economy continues to grow, the rate of unemployment must come down.

By expanding our social protection system through the social relief of distress, SRD, grant, we have reduced the number of people living in food poverty.

We are strengthening our anticorruption laws.

Our country has been removed from the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force. We continue to make the progress that was difficult to make in previous years.

The work we have done to rebuild key institutions from state capture is showing results. The SA Revenue Service is once again a world-class tax authority. The Investigating Directorate Against Corruption continues with its work and is making progress in the prosecution of those who need to be prosecuted. Most importantly, our democratic system is maturing and growing stronger.

The Government of National Unity has shown that it is possible for South Africans to come together from across the political spectrum to work on a common agenda for growth and progress.

Last year, we hosted the leaders of the world for a successful G20 Summit which showcased our country's strength on the global stage. Confidence is rising among investors, businesses and consumers.

These improvements are the result of a determined effort across government and across society. They show what is possible when we work with unity and purpose. Now, we have a unique window of opportunity to translate these gains into sustained growth.

Despite this progress, we must be honest about the challenges we still face. Although we are moving forward, we must not claim any easy victories. We are still far from where we need to be. For too many people, life remains hard. Jobs are scarce and opportunity is out of reach.

South Africans are worried about violent crime and corruption. They are concerned about the state of local government and its inability to deliver basic services in many parts of the country. Above all, they are desperate for work and for an income to support their families.

We can only be strong when we are equal, when the progress we have made is shared by all South Africans. The Constitution calls on us to work towards a society in which every South African has a fair chance to make a better life for themselves, in which every child receives a decent education and an opportunity to work and thrive, in which we reclaim our public spaces and meet one another in the street as equals, and in which the state works for the people and the corrupt face consequences.

This state of the nation address outlines the actions that we have taken since last year and the steps we will take this year, to advance the strategic priorities of the Government of National Unity.

These priorities, to remind ourselves, are 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.

This evening, we outline the work we must do together to build stronger communities and a stronger nation. We outline the work we must do together to build a South Africa that is more prosperous, more inclusive, more peaceful, more united and ultimately, more equal.

A stronger South Africa must be safe and secure. The cost of crime is measured in lives lost and futures cut short. It is felt also in the sense of fear that permeates our society, and in the reluctance of businesses to invest.

Children here in the Western Cape are caught in the crossfire of gang wars. People are chased out of their homes by illegal miners in Kagiso in Gauteng and in Bapo ba Mogale. Women are murdered by their partners in their homes. Building sites are shut down by criminals.

This must and will change. Organised crime is now the most immediate threat to our democracy, our society and our economic development.

Our primary focus this year is on stepping up the fight against organised crime and criminal syndicates and we will do so by using technology, intelligence and integrated law enforcement.

We will tackle organised crime by consolidating intelligence at national level, identifying priority syndicates and deploying handpicked, multidisciplinary intervention teams focused on dismantling criminal networks.

To strengthen our fight against gang violence, I will be deploying the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, to support the police, as we did to great effect with illegal mining. I have directed the Acting Minister of Police and the SANDF to develop a tactical plan on where our security forces should be deployed within the next few days in the Western Cape and Gauteng to deal with gang violence and illegal mining. As required by the Constitution, I will inform the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces regarding the timing and place of deployment of our soldiers and what it will cost. We have to act to rid our country of gang violence.

At the same time, we are implementing an integrated strategy to address the root causes of crime through co-ordinated interventions across society, from street lighting to access to social services.

We are going to tackle gun crime by streamlining legislation and regulations on licencing, possessing and trading in firearms and ammunition. We will increase enforcement of existing gun laws.

We are putting more boots on the ground through the recruitment this year of 5 500 additional police officers, adding to the 20 000 new officers we announced previously in the state of the nation address.

We are also addressing the threat posed by the infiltration of illegal and counterfeit goods to South African jobs and industry.

We are establishing a national illicit economy disruption programme that brings together key state agencies and other stakeholders, including the private sector.

Through effective use of data analytics and AI, we will be targeting high-risk sectors like tobacco, fuel, alcohol and other counterfeit products.

The hearings of the Madlanga Commission of Inquiry and the hearings that are going on in the ad hoc committee here have exposed rampant corruption in SAPS and some metro police departments through the abuse of power.

We cannot tolerate this. The rule of law depends on a police service that is ethical, responsive and rooted in the communities that it serves.

The SA Police Service has established a task team to ensure that investigations arising from the Madlanga Commission are undertaken swiftly and without interference.

The State Security Agency will re-vet the senior management of the SA Police Service and metro police departments. The vetting process will include lifestyle audits as well.

As we have successfully done with previous commissions, we will use the recommendations of the Madlanga Commission to make far-reaching changes. We are determined that the commission's findings and recommendations will lay the basis for a fundamental reform of our criminal justice system.

We are confident that these efforts will succeed, because the great majority of police officers are dedicated to upholding the law and diligently serving the people of South Africa.

Drawing on the success of Operation Vulindlela in advancing economic reform, we will use a similar approach to establish a hard-hitting new criminal justice reform initiative. This will crack down on organised crime, illicit firearms and trade, using a dedicated team to ensure that reforms are implemented across the system.

We are further intensifying the fight against corruption by strengthening bodies such as the Special Investigating Unit, the National Prosecuting Authority and the Hawks.

We will finalise government's approach to the recommendation of the National Anticorruption Advisory Council on the establishment of a permanent, independent, overarching anticorruption body.

We cannot accept that those who speak out against corruption are victimised, targeted and killed. The Whistle-Blower Protection Bill will

be introduced in Parliament. Among other things, this will criminalise retaliation and provide psychosocial, legal and financial support to whistle-blowers.

And there will be a special focus on restructuring our procurement system with a view to ending corruption. The Auditor-General reports that the majority of incidents of corruption originate in the procurement system. We cannot allow this cancer to continue and we must therefore act.

Measures taken will include the use of technology and the finalisation of the new Public Procurement Act regulations by mid-2026.

We cannot fight organised criminals by treading softly. We must act with zero tolerance and bring the full force of the law to bear. I would like this message to be clear: There will be no impunity for acts of criminality and corruption.

In addition to crime, water is now the single most important issue for many people in our country, from large cities like Johannesburg to smaller towns like Knysna and rural areas like Giyani. We have all seen the pain that our people have been expressing through demonstrations in various parts of Gauteng. These protests have been fuelled by frustrations that our people are feeling over inadequate and unreliable access to basic services such as water.

I have directed the Minister of Water and Sanitation and her Deputy, as well as the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs to attend to the water shortage problem and engage with our communities.

I can see you are excited!

As we speak, they are in Gauteng, engaging with our people, explaining to them precisely how government intends to immediately deal with the challenges our people are experiencing. They have informed me that the pipes that had been damaged are being repaired and the reservoirs are filling up again.

Now, this comes from poor planning and inadequate maintenance of water systems by many municipalities, and it is the main cause of the problems and the reason we now have empty taps.

There is no silver bullet to address this challenge which has its roots in systemic failures and many years of neglecting infrastructure.

To ensure water security in the long term, we are building new dams and upgrading existing infrastructure. We have committed more than R156 billion in public funding for water and sanitation infrastructure over the next three years.

The construction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and other large-scale projects like the Ntabelanga Dam, part of the uMzimvubu Water Project in the Eastern Cape, is advancing.

We are in the final stages of establishing a national water resource infrastructure agency to effectively manage the country's water infrastructure and to mobilise funding for infrastructure.

However, the real challenge lies not in the availability of water, but in getting water to people's taps. The Water Services Amendment Bill will enable us to hold water service providers accountable for their performance and to withdraw their license, if they fail to deliver.

If a municipality is not willing or able to provide a service to its residents, it must be done by another structure that can do so. These reforms will address the root causes of the water crisis.

In the short term, we need to address the immediate crisis, where water outages are being experienced right now.

Three years ago, when we were experiencing daily power cuts, we established the National Energy Crisis Committee to enable a focused national response. We overcame what seemed like an insurmountable challenge, by adopting a clear plan and delivering on it.

Using the same approach, we will now elevate our response to the water crisis to a National Water Crisis Committee, which I will chair. This structure will bring together all existing efforts into a single co-ordinating body. The Deputy President has been working with a number of water authorities in the country, and we will co-ordinate all that to make sure we address this problem.

It will deploy technical experts and resources from national government to municipalities facing water challenges. It will ensure that action is taken swiftly and effectively to address the problem.

To address the challenges effectively, we will not hesitate to use the powers enshrined in the Constitution and in the Water Services Act to intervene in municipalities where necessary.

National government cannot stand by and believe that local government will be able to solve the problem which they are not able to solve. National government will therefore intervene.

We will hold to account those who neglect their responsibility to supply water to our people. Government has already laid criminal charges against 56 municipalities that have failed to meet their obligations. We will now move to even lay charges against municipal managers in their personal capacity for violating the National Water Act.

The critical problem is that, in many metros, cities and towns, water revenue is being used for other purposes and very little is invested in upgrading and maintaining water infrastructure.

To address this challenge, in line with the commitment that we made last year, we have introduced a new R54 billion incentive for metros to reform their water, sanitation and electricity services. This will ensure that revenues from water usage are put straight back into fixing pipes, reservoirs and pumping stations. Water outages are a symptom of a local government system that is not working.

A far-reaching overhaul is now underway to address the root causes of dysfunction in many municipalities. In many places, local government administrations are weak and governed by patronage, rather than technical capacity and merit.

In her most recent report on local government, the Auditor-General said that local government is characterised by insufficient accountability, failing service delivery, poor financial management and governance, weak institutional capability and widespread instability. She says that arresting the decline of local government will require our collective action. We are now taking collective action.

Learning from our experience of the past 30 years, we will, in the coming months, finalise a revised White Paper on Local Government. This will provide solutions for the functioning of an effective local government system. The White Paper will reimagine the way that our local government should work.

The current system is too complex and fragmented, expecting even small and weak municipalities to take on many responsibilities.

We will propose fundamental changes that recognise the reality that some municipalities can take on more functions than others, and that we need a differentiated approach to municipal powers and responsibilities.

We are also proposing a more structured co-operation between municipalities and traditional and Khoisan leadership institutions, to enable community engagement and shared problem-solving.

We will ensure that senior officials in local government have the required qualifications and are appointed through an independent process, free from political interference.

Where municipalities fail, we will strengthen the ability of national government to intervene more quickly and to direct corrective measures in the interests of serving our people better. These changes may be difficult. But they must be done.

While these fundamental reforms are underway, we will continue to implement targeted support to improve the delivery of basic services through the Presidential Working Groups on eThekweni and Johannesburg.

While we have made progress in stabilising eThekweni – which has led to investor confidence returning – there is much more that needs to be done

in Johannesburg to deal with collapsing infrastructure, financial mismanagement and electricity and water interruptions. The same implies to a few other metros in our country.

There are many committed people with skills and experience working in local government. It is our responsibility to remake, reorganise and better resource municipalities so that they can continue doing their work.

As a country, we are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. Just a few weeks ago, catastrophic flooding in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and parts of KwaZulu-Natal caused the loss of a number of lives and widespread destruction of homes, schools, clinics and other infrastructure. I visited Giyani and, where there were 16 nicely built houses, by the time we arrived, it was just an open veld. The houses had been washed away. It was like there were no houses ever before. The foundations, roofs and walls had been washed away.

The classification of the floods as a national disaster has enabled national and provincial government to prioritise funding to address the most pressing needs of the people affected.

A stronger South Africa depends on a growing economy. For more than 15 years, our economy has experienced low growth. All our actions now are driven by the need for rapid and inclusive economic growth, to create more jobs and to create, for that matter, better quality jobs.

To give effect to the Medium-Term Development Plan, Cabinet has approved a comprehensive implementation plan to drive growth and inclusion. Through this plan, we are working to revive growth by creating the conditions for firms and companies to invest, maintaining a clear and stable macroeconomic framework, investing in infrastructure that works, and creating a conducive regulatory framework that supports growth and enables competition and a focused and forward-looking industrial policy.

The foundation of this plan is investment, particularly in public infrastructure and labour intensive growth sectors that are capable of future growth. These include the digital and green economies in which young people will find employment opportunities.

Infrastructure is much more than an investment in brick, mortar, concrete and steel. It is an investment in jobs, productivity and growth.

For many years, fixed investment has been declining. We are now changing that. Government has committed more than R1 trillion in public investment over three years, to build and maintain infrastructure. This is the largest allocation of its kind in our country's history, and it will be transformative. It will create jobs.

Through the Infrastructure Fund and new regulations for public-private partnerships, we are using innovative funding models, reducing risk and attracting investors to fast-track projects in energy, water, transport and digital infrastructure.

We launched our first-ever infrastructure bond to raise funding for the infrastructure drive that we have embarked upon, which was more than two times oversubscribed. This shows that, when we put our resolve forward, and put forward innovative ways of raising money, those with money in the private sector do respond.

Disputes arising from implementation of tenders often delay the implementation of necessary infrastructure. We often find that, when an infrastructure project is about to be embarked upon, competitors start taking each other to court. Waiting for the long court process always delays the start of those projects.

To prevent undue delays in critical projects, we will establish specialised courts for commercial matters with dedicated judges and dedicated court rolls to ensure faster outcomes in matters that have a bearing on the economy and development. This will speed up the development of our infrastructure.

This year, we will begin the work to establish a professional state property company to transform the 88 000 buildings and 5 million hectares of land owned by the state into professionally managed engines of growth and development. I see you like this one very much.

Through Operation Vulindlela, we are working to transform the structure of our economy, to fix our infrastructure and make our electricity, water and logistics sectors more competitive and efficient.

Having put load shedding behind us, we must now transform our energy system to ensure long-term energy security. For decades, our economy grew on the back of cheap electricity. But then state capture, mismanagement, inadequate maintenance and inflated megaprojects drove up the cost of electricity to businesses and to ordinary citizens.

Now, with the far-reaching changes that we are making to the sector and with our abundant solar and wind resources, we will be able to drive down the cost of electricity. Regulatory changes have enabled a massive and growing pipeline of investment in renewable energy. By 2030, more than 40% of our energy supply will come from cheap, clean, renewable energy sources.

We are now establishing a level playing field for competition, so that we are never again exposed to the risk of relying on a single supplier to meet our energy needs.

We are restructuring Eskom and establishing a fully independent state-owned transmission entity, as I have said before. This entity will have ownership and control of transmission assets and be responsible for operating the electricity market.

Given the importance of this restructuring for the broader reform of the electricity sector, I have established a dedicated task team under the

National Energy Crisis Committee to address various issues relating to the restructuring process, including clear timeframes for its phased implementation. The Minister of Electricity, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of the Presidency and other Ministers will all work together to make sure that we come up clear proposals and timelines on how this will be phased, in terms of implementation. This task team will report to me within three months.

In addition, we will commence the first round of independent transmission projects this year to enable private investment in expanding our national grid. There has been tremendous interest in investments in our transmission process.

We will work in each province to address transformer overloading, illegal connections and equipment failure with the objective of eradicating load reduction by next year.

We are committed to the path that we have embarked on to modernise our energy system.

We have begun to turn around the performance of our rail system and ports, so that our businesses can get their products to global markets.

We have now enabled private rail operators to access our network on a concessionary basis, which will allow different rail companies to compete and move volumes from road to rail.

Later this year, we will initiate major public-private partnerships in our port terminals and rail corridors through a concession model that preserves public ownership by the state, while mobilising private investment and expertise. Last month, we concluded a partnership with an international port operator to manage the Durban Pier 2 Container Terminal, the largest in our country. This partnership will result in new investment in equipment and infrastructure at the port and will bring it back to world-class standards.

We continue preparations for the introduction of high-speed rail in South Africa. I know you love this one! I have been saying that we would like this to cover, initially, routes such as Johannesburg to Musina and eThekweni to Johannesburg. High-speed trains are operated in many parts of the world. They have cut down the time of travel, and, in my book, it should no longer take five to six hours to travel from eThekweni, or Durban, to Johannesburg, or four and a half hours from Johannesburg to Musina when it can be done in a much shorter space of time. Our people wanted this, and progress is now being made.

Nearly 30 companies indicated their willingness to participate in high-speed rail corridors when we put out a request for information last year. We are preparing to send out a request for proposals, which will introduce a new era of long-distance rail travel in South Africa at a faster pace.

We are determined to compete in a rapidly changing global economy. Our industrial policy focuses on areas where we have competitive advantage, where we can create jobs, and where we can drive up exports. Our trade policy is aimed at promoting sustainable development, growth, and strengthening our international partnerships.

In a world where countries are looking to diversify their supply chains, we have an opportunity to ramp up our exports across the globe. We have a diverse economy, high-quality manufacturing facilities, and strong regulatory frameworks. We are strengthening our capacity for trade negotiations and expanding our missions abroad to drive economic diplomacy.

Amid the turmoil in the global economy, we are supporting our established industries in the face of strong headwinds. We have moved to revive our ferrochrome industry and to protect jobs in our steel industry and in our automotive and other sectors that employ hundreds of thousands of South Africans in good-quality jobs. Ministers are crunching the numbers on a daily basis, seeking to protect the jobs that could be lost through the decline of these industries that are now facing fierce competition. We are working with businesses and workers to close loopholes in our tariff structure and develop additional measures to protect and grow our manufacturing base.

As we protect jobs in vulnerable industries, we remain focused on sectors that will drive future growth. We know that we can create millions of good-quality jobs in sectors like agriculture, mining, in the services industry, as well as in the green economy. These are areas where we can be more than competitive. We can be the best in the world. Our agriculture sector is expanding rapidly. Already, we are the second-largest exporter of citrus fruit in the world. We are opening new markets for our exports, from citrus and avocados to maize, livestock, grapes, and wine.

Through the Blended Finance Scheme, working with the Land Bank and the commercial banks, we have provided R7,8 billion in innovative funding for black producers. We will deploy 10 000 new extension officers to support farmers and to improve agricultural productivity. This will give rise to many opportunities for young people to be employed in the agricultural sector.

I saw that this works extremely well. In Ethiopia, in their agricultural sector that was really their worst sector, they employed 40 000 or so extension officers to support farmers. All of a sudden, agriculture has now become the best-performing sector in their economy.

While the rest of our agriculture sector is thriving, the cattle industry today is facing one of the worst outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease our country has ever experienced. This disease is damaging our economy, resulting in export bans, trade restrictions, and the devastation of herds. We have decided to vaccinate the entire national herd of 14 million cattle. This requires 28 million vaccines over the next few months. The state will

facilitate the acquisition of the vaccines centrally to ensure that we get the right vaccine for the particular strain of the virus in South Africa.

Like during COVID-19, many people felt tempted to acquire vaccines for themselves but, because we are a regulated economy and country, we wanted everything to be approved by our authority, the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority, SAHPRA. Similarly, in this case, with the cattle vaccine, SAHPRA, our authority, will be the one single organisation that will give approval.

We will work closely with the private sector to enable an efficient roll-out, and, most importantly, we will ensure that commercial, private, and communal farmers have immediate access to vaccines. I have established a task team made up of farming organisations ... yes ... farmer organisations and experts. Working together with the Minister of Agriculture and his department, it will report to me every month about the progress we are making in dealing with the pandemic.

Why do we do this? We do this because we have experts. We have people with great knowledge. We need to mobilise them. We need to bring them to work with government because they have the know-how and the wisdom. We have classified foot-and-mouth disease as a national disaster and will be mobilising all necessary capabilities within the state to deal with this crisis.

Our services sector, from digital technology to financial services, is growing. Our financial institutions are some of the best in the world, and they have the ability to compete in Africa and across the globe. We are attracting major investment in digital infrastructure, with 55 data centres already built and more than R50 billion of investment expected over the next few years.

Tourism is a vital driver of economic growth. Every 13 international tourist arrivals supports one job. Our tourism sector made history last year, recording the arrival of 10,5 million visitors from overseas. We must now promote the unique cultural, historical, and natural attractions of our country to reflect our country's identity. This can include traditional festivals, cultural areas in our country, local crafts, historical sites, and natural landscapes across the country in rural areas as well.

As we strengthen our criminal justice system, we will make areas safer for tourists to visit. In the coming year, we will extend the Electronic Travel Authorisation system to all countries that require visas, enabling applications for tourists to be processed digitally within a 24-hour period.

The biggest opportunity of all lies in the green economy. We are pivoting our economy to be a leading supplier of the products the world will rely on in decades to come. We are expanding support for the manufacturing of green products for global markets, from fertiliser to jet fuel, chemicals to steel. From March this year, we will introduce a 150% tax deduction for investment in new energy vehicles, while supporting the local production of batteries as well. International pledges to the Just Energy

Transition Investment Plan now stand at approximately R250 billion. This is financing large-scale investment in manufacturing, infrastructure, as well as skills.

South Africa has become the world's largest reserve of critical minerals. Our ore reserves are valued at more than R40 trillion, making mining a sunrise industry. After many years of declining investment in exploration, we are dedicating funds towards geological mapping and exploration to harness our critical mineral reserves. Just this week, the Industrial Development Corporation, IDC, announced more than R300 million in funding for the Frontier Rare Earths project in the Northern Cape. This has the potential to become one of the largest and lowest-cost new producers of minerals that are needed for smartphones, lithium batteries, and other products.

Confidence in the future of South African mining was very evident during the Mining Indaba this week here in Cape Town. New gold, copper, rare earths, platinum, and coal mines are being opened, and black people are now players – serious players – in this industry of late. We are happy about that.

At the G20 Leadership Summit in November last year, the G20 countries supported our proposal to expand local beneficiation of critical minerals and the export of finished goods — critical minerals, beneficiation that should take place at the source of extraction, right where the minerals are found.

Over the course of the first five South Africa Investment Conferences, we were able to raise R1,5 trillion in investment commitments. To date, over R600 billion that was committed has flowed into projects. New factories, mines, and other facilities are being opened each year. We have now set ourselves a target of raising R2 trillion in new investments over the next five years. We therefore look forward to hosting the sixth South Africa Investment Conference on 31 March 2026.

To build a more inclusive economy, we are going to back those who create opportunity. If every small and medium business in South Africa could employ one additional person, we would create 3 million new jobs.

However, many of these businesses – a number of which are owned by women and young people – cannot get funding to start or to grow. Many struggle to find markets for their goods and services, and nearly all small and medium enterprises have to contend with a multitude of regulations, by-laws, licensing requirements, and bureaucratic hurdles. We take seriously the public comments on the draft Business Licensing Bill and will ensure that the final Bill makes it easier, not harder, to start and run a small business in South Africa. We will do that.

This year, we will provide more than R2,5 billion in funding to over 180 000 small and medium enterprises, and extend a further R1 billion in guarantees. Naturally, we will seek to also focus on women-led and youth-led businesses to foster their empowerment. Also, we will amend

the National Credit Act regulations to make it easier to access credit at a lower cost.

The transformation of our economy is necessary to drive sustained growth, to reduce inequality, and to correct the injustices of the past. We are undertaking a review to refine, realign, and strengthen our broad-based black economic empowerment framework to ensure that it supports greater transformation and inclusive growth. All of these actions will create a stronger economy and fix the foundations that were broken.

It is a matter of national concern that too many South Africans remain unemployed and that too many young people struggle to find their first job. That is why we are rebuilding the economy, and creating work and livelihood opportunities on a large scale through public and social employment programmes. In places like Standerton in Mpumalanga, the Presidential Employment Stimulus is creating work that matters, turning dumping sites into parks and empty yards into community gardens. The SA Youth platform has provided millions of young people with access to work and learning opportunities for the first time. The Youth Employment Service, a partnership between business and government, placed over 200 000 young people in year-long work experience opportunities.

This year, we will introduce regulatory changes that will make it much easier for businesses to participate in the Youth Employment Service and create jobs for young people. In the coming year, we will expand our public employment programmes, including the Community Work Programme, Expanded Public Works Programme, and the Presidential Employment Stimulus. We will ensure they are better co-ordinated to provide income support, skills development, and pathways into longer-term work, particularly for young people and women.

To ensure that no one is left behind, we are implementing decisions to increase employment equity targets for persons with disabilities in the Public Service to 7% by 2030 and to mandate a 7% preferential procurement target across all government and public entities.

Above all, however, a strong economy relies on a well-educated, capable, and skilled population. Our focus now is on establishing a firm foundation for learning in the early years of a child's life. We are expanding access to early childhood development, ECD, through the Bana Pele mass registration of ECD facilities and an increase in subsidies for ECD learners. By making Grade R compulsory, we are getting all our children off to a good start. We are intensifying efforts to fix the basic education system, with a focus on early learning, literacy and numeracy, and mother-tongue-based bilingual education.

We must congratulate the matric class of 2025 that achieved an 88% pass rate. This is the highest pass rate in our history, reflecting both the commitment of the learners and the interventions we have made to improve learning, but we also congratulate them on the sacrifices they themselves have made to get where they are.

As we welcome improvements in the matric pass rate, we must address the high dropout rate in the last few years of schooling. More learners must be able to write matric and take subjects like mathematics and science that will enable them to progress further.

To enable the youth of today to transform our society and secure their future, we are preparing the ground for a skills revolution. We are undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the skills development system to implement a dual training model that integrates education with practical workplace experience. We will reform and reduce the number of Sector Education and Training Authorities to improve governance, strengthen industry participation, raise the quality of training, and better align skills development with the needs of the economy. This includes improving the use of technical and vocational education and training, TVET, colleges as the primary sites for occupational training and artisan development.

To support effective workplace-based learning, we will increase the proportion of the Skills Development Levy returned to employers, restoring it to its original level of 40%. We will also transform the National Skills Fund into a more agile, outcomes-driven instrument that supports unemployed young people to access workplace experience and employment, building on successful initiatives such as Jobs Boost. These reforms will ensure the various training programmes we have in government are a door to opportunity, not a dead end.

To absorb the increasing number of young people passing matric, we will expand opportunities for young people to enter institutions of higher learning. I have directed the Ministers of Finance and Higher Education to work on a proposal for us to build more universities and TVET colleges with specialised areas of focus. An immediate problem is the great shortage of student accommodation at our institutions of learning. I have also directed the Minister of Higher Education to address this challenge, working together with financial institutions on innovative methods in which government can provide student accommodation.

A stronger South Africa is built on strong communities, and strong communities look after their children. More than a quarter of children under five years are stunted, increasing their risk of disease and affecting their ability to learn and to grow. This is devastating for children and their families and has an impact on our society as a whole. This year, we will embark on a mission to end child stunting and malnutrition by 2030 and tackle malnutrition among young children, in line with the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children. We will focus on the crucial first 1 000 days of a child's life. Building on existing support such as the child support grant, we will implement targeted interventions to ensure that pregnant women and low birth-weight children get the protein and nutrients that they need. This is a massive crisis that demands attention and resources. The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement that will be presented by the Minister later this year will set out a clear allocation for the actions we need to take.

A major contributor to child stunting is excessive alcohol consumption, which can affect a child's development during pregnancy. Alcohol abuse leads to violence, to road accidents, and leads to crime. To address this scourge, we call on provincial governments to strengthen the regulation of alcohol by limiting the density of alcohol outlets, restricting trading hours, and ending the sale of alcohol in large containers. As national government, we have proposed measures to curb excessive alcohol use, including minimum unit pricing, higher excise duties and greater restrictions on alcohol advertising. We are consulting on these with stakeholders.

Since it was introduced during COVID-19, the social relief of distress grant has kept millions of South Africans out of food poverty. As a transformative instrument to improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable people, this grant will be continued into the future. This year, we will redesign the grant to more effectively support livelihoods, skills development, work opportunities, and productive activity.

We know that most of the money provided through social grants is spent on food and transport. In our cities and towns, most people live far away from workplaces and services. We are remaking our cities and reducing the cost of living for working families by expanding affordable housing and revitalising commuter rail. We are introducing a new model for housing, where people are given subsidies for ownership and rental in areas that are suitable for them. We are shifting from building houses for people to supporting them to build, to buy, or to rent their own houses.

Yesterday marked the 60th anniversary of the declaration of District Six here in this city as a white group area. A couple of hundred metres from here where we are, more than 60 000 residents were forcibly removed and relocated to the Cape Flats. The destruction of District Six is a painful reminder of our shared responsibility to redress the injustices of the past and to build vibrant and cohesive communities.

The restitution claim lodged in 1998 affirmed the lawful right of former residents of District Six and their descendants to come home. That return has required court supervision, detailed planning, and sustained public investment. Many homes have now been completed and handed over to verified claimants. With R500 million allocated to this work, we are proceeding with phase four of construction. The restoration of District Six is a goal we all seek and a responsibility that we must all shoulder.

We are working to build a healthy nation. As part of preparation for the National Health Insurance, we are investing in health facilities, personnel, and systems to improve access to quality care. We will be undertaking substantial investment in health infrastructure, prioritising the construction and revitalisation of our academic hospitals.

On a recent visit that I undertook, led by Minister Motsoaledi, to Dr George Mukhari Hospital in Ga-Rankuwa, I witnessed the dire effects of inadequate health infrastructure. Starting with Dr George Mukhari Hospital, we will be working with various public and private financing

institutions to finance the building and revitalisation of that hospital as well as other health care facilities.

As a nation, we are finally able to imagine a country without HIV/Aids. In support of our programmes to prevent and ultimately eliminate HIV, we will be undertaking a massive roll-out of Lenacapavir, a six-monthly injection that has proven highly effective in preventing the transmission of HIV. We are also working to end cervical cancer in our country by mobilising society to ensure that every young girl between the ages of nine and 15 receives the human papillomavirus, or HPV, vaccine.

Last year, we classified gender-based violence and femicide as a national disaster. Through this classification, we are able to better co-ordinate our response and direct efforts towards the most impactful interventions. Building on the National Strategic Plan, we will mobilise all sectors of society through communication and social mobilisation to challenge harmful attitudes and practices. We will continue to promote women's economic empowerment through training, financial support, and preferential procurement. We will strengthen law enforcement through faster investigation, improved case management, expanded sexual offences courts, and action against repeat offenders. We will scale up survivor-centred support, ensuring access to shelters, one-stop service centres, mobile and rural outreach, and the placement of social workers in our police stations.

Illegal immigration continues to pose a risk to our security, our stability, and our economic progress. We will address this problem while ensuring that the fundamental rights of every person in this country are upheld and protected. This year, we will take additional steps to secure our borders. Funding to strengthen border security will be prioritised, covering infrastructure, technology, and people. Key border posts will be redeveloped through public-private partnerships, and we will extend the Electronic Travel Authorisation to all international airports and the busiest land ports of entry.

We are already using drones and technology to greater effect all along our border line. The police, Home Affairs, and labour inspectors will work together to crack down on violations of existing immigration, labour, and other laws. Employers that hire foreign nationals without the required permits or visas will face the full might of the law. To tighten enforcement, we will hire an additional 10 000 labour inspectors this year.

As we undertake these interventions, we insist that the laws of our country must be observed by everyone. We will not tolerate violence and acts of lawlessness directed at foreign nationals. No foreign national should be unlawfully barred from accessing public facilities, including health facilities and schools.

To build a stronger South Africa, we need an ethical and capable developmental state. A capable state needs committed and honest public servants with the right skills and a deep culture of service. Over the past year, we have passed significant new legislation to professionalise the

Public Service. The Public Service Amendment Bill will protect key appointments from political interference and ensure that capable and qualified people are appointed to senior positions on the basis of their suitability for the job. Lifestyle audits have been made mandatory for senior public servants, reaching 93% compliance across departments.

We are establishing a central registry for disciplinary cases across all spheres of government. This will prevent people who are facing or have undergone disciplinary action from being employed elsewhere in the state.

We are continuing to improve the governance and performance of state-owned enterprises, SOEs, like Eskom, Transnet, Denel, the Passenger Rail Agency of SA, and others. This includes the implementation of clear standards of appointment to ensure that the leaders of these entities have the right qualifications and experience.

We will continue to work in a phased manner towards a centralised model for managing our SOE portfolio so that we can set standards, improve governance, and ensure financial sustainability to deliver on their mandates. This includes finalising the National State Enterprises Bill that will be done in this Parliament.

We will harness digital transformation as a driver of growth, inclusion, and effective service delivery. This year, Home Affairs will launch the Digital ID initiative to enable safe and secure use of digital services for all South Africans. We will digitise driver's licences, matric certificates, and services at the Master's Office. Citizens will be able to fill out police statements and determine their eligibility for SA Social Security Agency grants online and be tested remotely. All these services will be made available on the MyMzansi platform.

Soon, every South African will be able to access many of the services they need without having to visit a government office or filling out manual forms. This year alone, hundreds more bank branches will now offer smart card ID and passport services, thus shortening queues and decreasing waiting times. We will also work with civil society to ensure that citizens' protections and rights are safeguarded through this digital revolution.

For South Africa to be strong, our continent, Africa, must be at peace, and it must prosper. To advance the values of our Constitution and to promote our national interest, we seek a world that is sustainable, just, and inclusive. In an increasingly volatile world, South Africa holds firm to the principles that defined our G20 presidency and that underpin our foreign policy: solidarity, equality, sustainability.

Through our position in the African Union and the Southern African Development Community, SADC, we are advancing regional integration, peace, and stability. We are using our international relations to support domestic economic priorities, including manufacturing, value addition, and export growth. We are contributing to the implementation of the

African Continental Free Trade Area to expand trade between African countries, to drive industrialisation, and to create jobs.

South African firms — our banks, our farmers, our manufacturers — will be leading suppliers to an African market of 1,4 billion people whose working age population will double in the next 25 years. We are building mutually beneficial relationships with all countries on terms of equality and respect.

In a world where powerful nations often assert their dominance and influence over less powerful nations, our country's commitment to sovereignty and self-determination is sacrosanct. It is not negotiable. We will stand firm on our sovereignty and promote our national interests, our values, and the rights of our people. We are clear that we will continue to respect the rights and sovereignty of other nations, but we must be equally clear that we will not be bullied by any other country in the world. We will forge strong partnerships with like-minded countries to increase our shared resilience to global disruptions.

Building on our presidency of the G20 – which all attest to having been successful – we continue to advance the priorities of the Global South. These include inclusive growth, debt relief, climate action, reform of global governance institutions, and the beneficiation critical minerals at source, as we said.

Drawing on the work of the G20 Extraordinary Committee on Global Inequality, we are working with our international partners towards launching the International Panel on Inequality. This is an important pillar of the global effort to reduce inequality within and between nations.

We continue to champion multilateralism and strengthen humanitarian diplomacy. South Africa remains a clear and consistent voice for international law, for justice, and for human rights.

South Africa will continue to support the conflict prevention and peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations, UN, the African Union, and SADC. We are proud of the participation of South African soldiers in peacekeeping missions in many parts of our continent since the advent of democracy. We have requested the United Nations to allow us to withdraw our troops from the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where they were serving under the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO, with a view to consolidating our own Defence Force and strengthening it. We cannot consider ourselves free for as long as the people of Palestine, Cuba, Sudan, Western Sahara, and elsewhere suffer occupation, oppression, and war.

Fellow South Africans, our nation has reached what many people are saying is a turning point. We are leaving behind an era of decline and turning towards an era of prosperity and growth. We have done much to overcome the effects of state capture, the COVID-19 pandemic, the public

unrest of 2021, and the devastating floods of the following year. We are turning towards hope, towards the reality of a better future for all.

The progress we have made over the last five years gives us hope and encouragement. It shows what we can achieve when we work together. Now is not the time to rest. Now is the time for all South Africans to be part of taking our country forward.

Last year, we embarked on a new chapter in our democracy, launching a National Dialogue at a convention that brought together South Africans from across the country representing all sections of society. This year, the National Dialogue process will spread across South Africa, reaching every community, every school, every university, every college, and every part of our society.

Under the guidance of the Eminent Persons Group consisting of prominent and respected South Africans and led by an inclusive steering committee, these public dialogues will give the citizens of our country the opportunity to raise their concerns, their aspirations, and their plans for the future. These public dialogues will culminate in a national convention where all these conversations will be brought together to outline the actions that we must take to build a better South Africa. These conversations will guide the formulation of an overarching national compact and the next phase of our National Development Plan by 2030.

In building this national consensus, we must draw not only on the shared values of our Constitution, but also on the unifying power of sport and the rich diversity of our culture. As we celebrate those amongst us who have reached the heights of global achievement, we must appreciate how sport and cultural activities have helped to build a cohesive society.

Harnessing the spirit of the women of 1956, the youth of 1976, and the people of South Africa in 1996 when they drafted the Constitution, the year 2026 must be a year of transformative change. This must be the year that we make South Africa stronger, not weaker. We must fix what we must fix — local government. We must fight crime and corruption, and we must restore trust in the criminal justice system. We must create jobs and livelihoods for every South African, and we must build a state that works for all the people of South Africa.

Above all, we must ensure that this rising tide lifts every South African. As the economy grows, it should bring into its fold those who have lived on its margins for decades. This is the time for all South Africans to rise, and we must rise together.

Thank you very much!

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

XOLILE GEORGE
Secretary to Parliament