

THURSDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2025

PROCEEDINGS AT JOINT SITTING

Members of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces assembled in the Cape Town City Hall at 18:56.

The Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces took the Chair.

The Speaker requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation, urging members to remember the fallen members of the SA National Defence Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

CALLING OF JOINT SITTING

The SPEAKER: Hon members, the President has called this 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, read with Joint Rule 13(1)(a), to deliver his state of the nation address to Parliament. I now call on the hon President to address the Joint Sitting.

[Applause.]

STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

The PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC: Speaker of the National Assembly, Miss Thoko Didiza, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Ms Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Paul Mashatile, Chief Justice of the Republic, Judge Mandisa Maya, Judges President, former President of the Republic, Mr Thabo Mbeki ... [Applause.] ... former President, Kgalema Motlanthe ... [Applause.] ... former Deputy President ... [Applause.] [Interjections.] ... David Mabuza, former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Baleka Mbete ... [Applause.] ... former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Lechesa Tsenoli ... [Applause.] ... former Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Maseko ... [Applause.] ... Mayor of the City of Cape Town, Geordin Hill-Lewis ... [Applause.] ... Dean of the diplomatic corps, regional deans, heads of missions, Members of Parliament, and fellow South Africans, we gather here as we mourn the tragic death and devastating loss of 14 South African soldiers who were part of a mission to bring peace to the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. We pay tribute and bow our heads to Staff Sergeant William Eddie Cola, Staff Sergeant Molahlehi Ishmael Molahlehi, Staff Sergeant Shwahlane Theophilus Seepe, Corporal Matome Justice Malesa, Corporal Rinae Nemavhulani, Lance Bombardier Itumeleng

McDonald Moreo, Lance Corporal Tseke Moffat Molapo, Lance Corporal Metse Stansly Raswiswi, Rifleman Sebatane Richard Chokoe, Rifleman Derrick Maluleke, Rifleman Tshidiso Andries Mabele, Rifleman Calvin Louis Moagi, Rifleman Mokete Joseph Mobe, and Private Peter Jacobus Strydom.

Speaker, I thank you for allowing us to honour these fallen heroes. I have directed that the national flag be flown at half-mast in honour of these fallen heroes for a week, starting tomorrow morning.

Alongside soldiers from other southern African countries, they lost their lives in defence of the fundamental right of the Congolese people to live in peace and secure. They lost their lives not in pursuit of resources, or territory or power. They lost their lives so that the guns on our continent may be forever silenced. So, we salute them.

My fellow South Africans, this state of the nation address is taking place as we celebrate 70 years since the adoption of the Freedom Charter at the congress of the people in Kliptown in 1955. The Freedom Charter is the cornerstone of our democratic Constitution. It sets out a vision of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa. It also sets out a vision of a country in which government is founded on the will of the people of South

Africa, where the land is shared among those who work it, where the people share in the country's wealth and in all that the country produces, and all equal before the law. It is this vision that continues to guide us as we work to build a nation that we all want. It is the spirit of the congress of the people that inspires us as we prepare for a national dialogue in which South Africans are once again called upon to chart a new path for our country.

We must chart this path in a world that is rapidly changing. It is a world of both interdependence and competition, and of co-operation and conflict. It is a multipolar world in which new countries are emerging to play a greater role in global affairs. We are seeing intensifying competition over issues such as trade, technology, and influence in global institutions. There are global fundamental shifts underway that affect every aspect of human life, from the growing impact of climate change to rapid advances in artificial intelligence, geopolitical tensions, and violent conflicts.

In the face of these challenges, we are witnessing the rise of nationalism, protectionism, the pursuit of narrow interests, and the decline of common cause. This is the world that we, as South Africa, a developing economy must now navigate. But we are not daunted to navigate our path through this world that constantly changes. We will not be deterred. We South Africans

are a resilient people and we will not be bullied. [Applause.] We will stand together as a united nation, and we will speak with one voice in defence of our national interests, our sovereignty, and our constitutional democracy. By staying true to our values, by harnessing our unique strengths and endowments, and by forging a common purpose, we can turn these trying circumstances to our advantage and propel our country forward. [Applause.]

As South Africans, we stand for peace and justice. We stand for equality and solidarity. We stand for a non-racial future, for democracy, tolerance, as well as compassion. We stand for equal rights for women, for persons with disabilities, and for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We stand for our shared humanity and not for the survival of the fittest.

So, this evening, let us speak about the nation that we want. Let us speak of the future that we want to build. Let us speak of the work that we, as South Africans, must do and the work that we are doing to build that nation and to build that future.

We want a nation united in its diversity. At many difficult moments in our past, we found strength in working together towards a common goal. Through partnership, we brought peace and democracy to our country, which was once troubled. We

overcame apartheid - a crime against humanity that denied people their human rights, that deprived them of the land and livelihoods, that sought to strip them of their dignity, and that humiliated them. Through partnership, we overcame a devastating pandemic and rebuilt our country in the wake of state capture as well. Together, we have built durable institutions that support our democracy, protect our fundamental rights and promote the wellbeing of South Africans. We have built meaningful partnerships between government and business, labour, civil society, and other social partners to drive growth and development. These stand as models of co-operation for the rest of the world.

South Africans are continuing to work together to confront our country's challenges and build a nation that works for all. Guided by the wishes of the people as expressed in last year's elections, we have formed a Government of National Unity to give expression to our culture of co-operation. As political parties, we have set aside our differences and agreed to work together for the good of all South Africans.

In the last week, we have adopted the Medium-Term Development Plan, MTDP, which sets out a clear and ambitious programme for the next five years. The actions contained in the Medium-Term Development Plan will advance our three strategic priorities: firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation; secondly,

to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living; and lastly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

Our most urgent task is to grow our economy so that we can create jobs, reduce poverty, and improve the lives of all South Africans. To undertake this task, we need a government that works for the people. We need a state that is capable and competent, underpinned by a professional public service.

South Africans want a state that treats all people with dignity, humility, and respect. A state with leaders who are prepared to serve our people with complete dedication, and public servants who are ethical, skilled, and properly qualified. To achieve these objectives, we are strengthening the role of the Public Service Commission in the appointment of the key people who direct the affairs of our state such as directors-general, deputy directors-general, chief executive officers of state-owned enterprises, SOEs, and board members and other senior positions.

We will introduce a Graduate Recruitment Scheme so that we may attract the best and the brightest into the public service. A capable state must start where our people live and work.

In many cities and towns across the country, roads are not maintained, water and electricity supply are often disrupted,

refuse is not collected, and sewage runs in the streets. In part, this has happened because many municipalities lack the technical skills and resources required to meet our people's needs. Many municipalities have not reinvested the revenue they earn or collect from these services into the upkeep of infrastructure. Starting this year, we will work with our municipalities to establish professionally managed and ring-fenced utilities for water and electricity services to ensure that there is adequate investment and maintenance ...

[Applause.]

Many of the challenges in municipalities arise from the design of our local government system. We will therefore undertake extensive consultation to develop an updated White Paper on Local Government to outline a modern and fit-for-purpose local government system. [Applause.] We will review the funding model for municipalities. [Applause.] We will do so because many of our municipalities truly do not have a viable and sustainable revenue base. We will work with traditional leaders in the implementation of local development programmes. [Applause.] We will also seek to work with our traditional leaders to ensure that they continue their own work as we give them the recognition as the natural and indigenous leaders of our people. [Applause.]

We will expand our support to municipalities that require assistance, drawing on the lessons of the Presidential eThekweni Working Group. We are seeing great progress in eThekweni as we implement the District Development Model ... [Applause.] ... which enables all key role players as in government, business, labour, and community-based organisations to work together.

As we work to reform the public service and build the capability of the state, we will harness technology to transform the way that government works. We will invest in digital public infrastructure to give South Africans access to government services anytime, anywhere, through a relaunched ... [Applause.] ... gov.za platform. At the heart of this transformation will be the implementation of a digital identity system. [Applause.] These measures will, in the end, transform the relationship between citizens and government and create one government that is accessible to every person at a touch. We want a nation with a thriving economy that benefits all.

To create this virtuous cycle of investment, growth, and jobs, we must lift economic growth to above 3%. To achieve higher levels of economic growth we are undertaking massive investment in new infrastructure while upgrading and maintaining the infrastructure we have. We are developing

innovative ways of funding infrastructure. We are engaging local and international finance institutions and investors to unlock R100 billion in infrastructure financing. [Applause.] A project preparation bid window has been launched to fast-track investment readiness. This includes revised regulations for public-private partnerships, which will unlock private sector expertise and funds.

Government will spend more than R940 billion on infrastructure over the next three years. [Applause.] This includes R375 billion in spending by state-owned enterprises. This funding will revitalise our roads and bridges, build dams and waterways, modernise our ports and airports and power our economy. Through the Infrastructure Fund that we launched some time ago, 12 blended finance projects worth nearly R38 billion have been approved in the last year. These are projects in water and sanitation, student accommodation, transport, health, and energy.

The construction of the Mtentu Bridge in the Eastern Cape continues. This bridge will rise above the river between Port Edward and Lusikisiki and will become the tallest bridge in Africa. [Applause.] The Polihali Dam in Lesotho will feed 490 million cubic litres of water a year from the Lesotho Highlands into the Vaal River system, securing water supply to several provinces for years to come. [Applause.]

Working with international partners, we are revitalising small harbours, unlocking economic opportunities for coastal communities. We are also looking very closely at the harbour that we will build in the Northern Cape in Boegoebaai because that is going to be a game-changer for the Northern Cape.

[Applause.]

We are steadily removing the obstacles to meaningful and faster growth. The economic reforms that we are implementing through Operation Vulindlela have created a new sense of optimism and confidence in our economy. Investors are looking at South Africa with interested eyes as they see the reforms that we are implementing through Operation Vulindlela.

We have made progress in rebuilding and restructuring several of our network industries. We are seeing positive results in the improvement of the functioning of our network industries as well as the investment opportunities that are opening and are being taken up by investors leading to job creation. Working together with business, labour and other social partners we must now finish the work that we started.

Over the coming year, we will initiate a second wave of reform to unleash more rapid and inclusive growth. Our immediate focus is to enable Eskom, Transnet, and other state-owned enterprises that are vital to our economy to function

optimally. We are repositioning these entities to provide world-class infrastructure while enabling competition in operations, whether in electricity generation, freight, rail, or port terminals.

We continue with the fundamental reform of our state-owned enterprises to ensure that they can effectively fulfil their social and economic mandates. This includes the work underway to put in place a new model to strengthen governance and oversight of our public entities.

We will ensure public ownership of strategic infrastructure for public benefit while finding innovative ways to attract private investment to improve services and ensure public revenue can be focused on the provision of public services. We are in the process of establishing a dedicated SOE Reform Unit to co-ordinate this work.

The measures we have implemented through the Energy Action Plan have reduced the severity and frequency of load shedding, with more than 300 days without load shedding since March 2024. [Applause.] While the return of load shedding for two days, last week, was a reminder that our energy supply is still constrained, we remain on a very positive trajectory. [Applause.] Whether people like it or not, we now need to put the risk of load shedding behind us once and for all. The

Minister of Electricity will speak about it in about two weeks or so when he presents to Parliament. We need to put that behind us once and for all by completing the reform of our energy system to ensure long-term energy security. The Electricity Regulation Amendment Act, which came into effect on 01 January, marks the beginning of a new era in our energy architecture.

This year, we will put in place the building blocks of a competitive electricity market. Over time, this will allow multiple electricity generation entities to emerge and compete.

We will mobilise private sector investment in our transmission network to connect more renewable energy to the grid. The Minister will tell us that we still need to install 14 000kms of transmission lines. We therefore need to mobilise finance from several sources to enable this to happen. As we reform our energy system, we are continuing to build successful multilateral partnerships in the global effort to halt the devastating impact of climate change.

Our Just Energy Transition is gaining momentum. Over US\$13 billion has been pledged by the international community and significant private capital is being invested locally. We are determined to meet our carbon reduction commitments and

will do so at a pace and scale that our country can afford.

[Applause.]

We are revitalising our port terminals and rail corridors through the Freight Logistics Roadmap, which was adopted by Cabinet, leveraging private capital to restore our logistics infrastructure to world class standards. Transnet's performance has stabilised and is steadily improving. We released a Network Statement in December 2024 which, for the first time, will enable private rail operators to access the freight rail system that will continue to be owned by the state. Open access to the rail network will allow train operating companies to increase the volume of goods transported by rail, while our network infrastructure remains state-owned. This will ensure that South African minerals, vehicles that we manufacture, and our agricultural produce reach international markets, securing jobs and earning much-needed revenue for our fiscus. New cranes and other port equipment are being commissioned to speed up the loading and unloading of cargo and reduce waiting times for ships in our various ports.

As we forge ahead with the reform agenda, an urgent priority is to ensure a secure and reliable supply of water across the country. Many people in our cities, towns, and villages are experiencing more frequent water shortages because of failing

water infrastructure. It is impossible to live without water as we all know, and it is impossible for the economy to grow without water. We are therefore taking a series of decisive actions to resolve the water crisis, to enable our people to get water where they live, whether in townships or rural areas. We are investing heavily in expanding our water resources. Wherever one goes in our country, we often hear our citizens raising the issue of water continuously. So, we are raising this issue to a much higher level. Like we did with electricity, I know, and I am hopeful that we will resolve the water crisis that we have. [Applause.]

Loko hi famba eka tindhawu to tala hi kuma leswaku vakhegula va rila hi mhaka yo pfumaleka ka mati. Va hi byela hilaha mati ma pfumalekaka hakona eka tindhawu ta vona. Va kombela leswaku mfumo wu va tisela mati. Ina, hi ta swi endla hinkwaswo sweswo. Tivani leswaku mati ma ta fika laha mi tshamaka kona. Mi ta ma kuma. [Va phokotela.] (*Translation of Xitsonga paragraph follows.*)

[When going around many areas, we find old ladies complaining about the scarcity of water. They tell us about the scarcity of water in their areas. They want the government to provide them with water. Yes, we will do all that. We want you to know that there will be water in your area. You will have water. [Applause.]]

To date, the Infrastructure Fund has secured R23 billion for seven large water infrastructure projects. We have ended delays in major water infrastructure projects, like Phase 2 of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and the uMkhomazi Dam. Work is underway to prepare for construction of the Ntabelanga Dam on the uMzimvubu River to supply additional water for domestic use, as well as for irrigation in the Eastern Cape. Within the next year, we will complete the establishment of the National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency to unlock much greater investment in water projects.

Through the Water Services Amendment Bill, we will introduce a licensing system for water service providers and remove licenses where providers do not meet the standards for quality drinking water. [Applause.] As part of our reform agenda, we will ensure that our focus on water is intensive and is sped up.

As we move ahead with our reform processes, we will continue to enhance our visa system to make it easier for skilled people to invest in our country and to grow tourism. This year, we will launch an Electronic Travel Authorisation system to enable a secure, fully digital visa application process. [Applause.] This system will use artificial intelligence and automation to reduce the scope for corruption and enable rapid turnaround times for tourist visas. We have cleared over 90%

of the backlog of more than 300 000 visa applications.

[Applause.]

These reforms that we are implementing send a strong message that South Africa is open for business and tourism. As we open for tourism, the Chinese market, the Indian market, the market in the Middle East, the market in Europe, and all over are waiting to come to our country as tourists. We want a nation in which prosperity and opportunity is shared by all.

For many decades our economy has been held back by the exclusion of most of the South African people. Black South Africans were deprived of land, capital, skills, opportunities. Our economy was starved of the potential that it has. And that is why we needs to transform our economy and make it more inclusive. That is why our focus is on empowering our people, women and persons with disabilities because they were deliberately excluded from playing a role in the economy of their own country. [Applause.] We will set up a Transformation Fund worth R20 billion a year over the next five years ... [Applause.] ... to fund black-owned and small business enterprises. We will fast-track the regulations of the Public Procurement Act to ensure that businesses owned by women, young people, and persons with disabilities receive equitable opportunities in government contracts ... [Applause.] ... We have started, and we will continue to train

women entrepreneurs to enable them to compete for government tenders.

In November last year, we launched the National Skills Fund Disabilities Programme. In its first phase, this transformative initiative will empower over 10 000 persons with disabilities through tailored training for them ... [Applause.] ... and by ensuring that they get stipends and specialised tools. This part of the work we must undertake as business, government, labour, and civil society to enable people with disabilities to play an important role in the economy of our country. For far too long they have been relegated to the backrooms of everything.

Through these programmes we are not only righting a grave historical wrong, but we are also unleashing the potential of our economy for sustained growth. [Applause.] We want a nation where there is work for all. Where every person can earn a decent living and realise their potential. Where the rights of workers are protected and working conditions are improved. Where women and men receive equal pay for work of equal value. [Applause.] We need to ensure that growth creates jobs for all, especially for young people.

The success of the Presidential Employment Stimulus shows how public employment programmes can create meaningful work that

generates a wider benefit and contributes to sustainable employment. The employment stimulus that we introduced during the COVID period has created almost 2,2 million work and livelihood opportunities through innovative models that provide high-quality work to participants.

The Social Employment Fund has created over 80 000 jobs this year. It has supported more than 12 000 participants to enter entrepreneurial activities.

During the past year, young people secured 235 000 work opportunities through the National Pathway Management Network ... [Applause.] ... and this is underpinned by the SAYouth.mobi platform.

We now need to build on these innovative programmes to create jobs for youth at even greater scale. To create jobs, we must leverage our unique strengths and our unrealised potential to build the industries of the future as in green manufacturing, renewable energy, electric vehicles, and the digital economy that is also driven by artificial intelligence.

This year, we will finalise a modernised and comprehensive industrial policy that drives economic growth. We will achieve this ambition by focusing on the opportunities in localisation, diversification, digitisation, and

decarbonisation. We are working towards the full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA, which will tear down the barriers to trade on our continent. As the most industrialised economy on the African continent, we are positioning ourselves to be at the centre of this new growing market.

We are harnessing the sun and the wind to make our country a leader in renewable energy and green manufacturing. With an abundance of cheap green energy, we can produce products that are competitive anywhere in the world and create hundreds of thousands of new jobs in the process. We are making sustainable use of the rich abundance of the South African earth.

By supporting our farmers, improving our logistics network, rural supply chains, and opening new export markets for products that we produce, we can significantly expand our agricultural sector. We want South Africa to be leading in the commercial production of products such as hemp and cannabis. A product that is so well-known in the Eastern Cape ...

[Interjections.] ... and KwaZulu-Natal ... [Interjections.]

... a product that our forebearers have produced for generations ... We can add modern value to it and bring it to the shelves of the entire world.

We are breathing new life into the mining industry, which remains one of our most important and valuable endowments. I often say that mining was the bedrock on which our economy was built, and it continues to be a sunrise industry. We are on track to implement a new, modern, and transparent mining rights system this year, which will unlock investment in exploration and production. [Applause.] We will put in place an enabling policy and regulatory framework for critical minerals. By beneficiating these minerals here in South Africa, we can make use of the extraordinary wealth that lies beneath our soil for the benefit of our people.

Even more valuable than our natural resources are the diversity, energy, and talent of the people of this country.

The services sector is now the largest part of our economy, ranging from financial services to retail, hospitality, tourism, and the burgeoning creative industry. The tourism sector is growing rapidly, with close to 9 million tourists having visited our country last year. [Applause.] One of the attractive sites in our country, which we want to see growing more, is Robben Island. I visited Robben Island on 8 January and got to hear that, in a year, they are now going to receive 300 000 visitors and want to grow it to half a million visitors in a year. Most of these visitors are South Africans.

We will grow tourism through our visa reforms, through increasing the number of flights to key destinations, and through marketing of our country as the best country in the world to visit. [Applause.]

We have also seen strong growth in digital services, business process outsourcing, as well as data centres. As the need for data grows in the world, our country is seen as a reservoir of data centres, and this continue to create jobs for young people. To support this growth, we are investing in skills development for the industries of the future.

The Jobs Boost fund has pioneered a new model that links funding for skills in demand for the successful placement and particularly employment of young people.

We are expanding our support for small and medium enterprises and for the informal economy which sustains millions of jobs as well as livelihoods across our country. This includes streamlining funding for small businesses, unlocking venture capital for high growth startups and developing a regulatory environment that enables rather than restricts informal enterprises.

To build an innovative economy, the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation will establish an innovation fund to

provide venture capital to tech startups that emerge from our higher education institutions.

We are calling on business to use the SA Youth.mobi platform – which currently has some 4,5 million young people registered – for their hiring purposes. We are calling on business to support the Youth Employment Service and to scale up workplace experience opportunities over the coming year.

We want a nation where no one goes hungry. For 30 years since the dawn of democracy, we have worked together to reduce poverty. Today, our country spends around 60% of our national Budget on the social wage, on health, education, social protection, community development and public employment programmes. More than 28 million unemployed and vulnerable people in our country receive social assistance. More than 10,5 million learners go to public schools where they do not have to pay fees. Last year, over 900 000 students from poor and working-class backgrounds received funding to study at universities and colleges. [Applause.] Through these programmes we are alleviating the worst effects of poverty. We are providing the means through which South Africans can rise above the poverty that has been passed down from one generation to the next.

But we have much to do and much more work needs to be done to end poverty in our country. We must do much more to ensure that women in particular no longer face a hopeless task to feed and clothe their children.

While government invests heavily to support poor and unemployed people, these programmes are fragmented and sometimes difficult to access. We are therefore building an integrated system of support for poor and unemployed people. We are strengthening existing programmes from job search support to public employment and making sure that together they provide people with pathways out of poverty. Rather than expecting those in need to approach several government agencies separately, a citizen should be able to go to one place to receive all the support that they need.

To protect the gains that we have made since 1994 in advancing children's rights, we will adopt a national strategy to accelerate action for children which focuses on 10 key priorities, including poverty reduction, child protection and addressing malnutrition.

The social relief of distress grant is as an essential mechanism for alleviating extreme poverty. We will use this grant as a basis for the introduction of a more sustainable form of income support for unemployed people. [Applause.]

Central to our efforts to end poverty and to develop our economy is to provide decent quality education to every South African. We are immensely proud of the achievements of the matric class of 2024. [Applause.] It is a class which achieved the highest pass rate in our country's history. [Applause.] Eighty-seven percent of learners who sat for their matric exams passed. For the first time in the history of our country, nearly half of these learners achieved a bachelor pass. [Applause.] Frankly, nothing can diminish our pride in the hard work of these learners and the steady support of their teachers, parents and broader community. Let us give them a big round of applause! [Applause.] We should all be proud of the class of 2024.

But our immediate focus is to expand access to early childhood development for every child. This will be achieved through registering and formalising the existing early childhood development, ECD, centres and ensuring that they have the facilities, the training and material that they need to provide quality early learning. We will focus on ensuring that every child can read for meaning in the Foundation Phase to set them up for success in later years. To achieve this, we are implementing mother tongue-based bilingual education. [Applause.] We do this to improve literacy and numeracy and rolling out lesson plans, reading books and other interventions that have been proven to work.

The Funza Lushaka Bursary scheme will continue to prioritise students who want to pursue a teaching career in the Foundation Phase. Last year, we signed the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act which was passed by this Parliament.

[Applause.] This Act is pivotal for ensuring that education is accessible and is inclusive for all South Africans. This year, the Minister of Basic Education will introduce national policy, norms and standards and regulations to empower all partners in the basic education field to support the implementation of the Act. [Applause.]

To ensure that the economy has the skills that it needs, we are increasing the production of artisans through the Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, colleges. [Applause.] This is part of the shift we are undertaking towards education and skills development that combines formal learning with job training. Drawing on the models that have proven to be so successful in other countries, we are calling on the private sector to offer young people experiential learning opportunities while they undertake their studies. We are implementing Phase 1 of the comprehensive student funding model for higher education to address the needs of the missing middle. This will support approximately 10 000 students in the first year.

We want a nation in which there is quality health care for all. This year, we will proceed with the preparatory work for the establishment of the National Health Insurance.

[Applause.] This includes developing the first phase of a single electronic health record system, the preparatory work to establish the ministerial advisory committees on health technologies and health care benefits, and an accreditation framework for health service providers.

The National Health Insurance, NHI, will reduce inequalities in health care by ensuring that everyone gets fair medical treatment. [Applause.] The NHI will save many lives by providing a package of services that include, for example and more especially, maternal and newborn care and also services for people living with HIV, those with TB and those suffering from noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Our most immediate priority is to strengthen the health system and improve the quality of care. A vital part of this is the modernisation, improvement and maintenance of existing health facilities and the construction of new hospitals and clinics.

A number of hospitals are under construction or are undergoing revitalisation. These include the Limpopo Central Hospital, Siloam District Hospital in Limpopo, Dihlabeng Regional

Hospital in the Free State, Bambisana District Hospital, Zithulele District Hospital in the Eastern Cape and the Bophelong Psychiatric Hospital in North West.

Other projects are at various stages of design and development. This includes the replacement of three existing new central hospitals, five new district hospitals, five community health centres and a new psychiatric hospital. To improve patient experience, we are putting more emphasis on reducing waiting times, cleanliness and staff attitudes in public health facilities.

We are encouraged by the great progress the country has made towards ending HIV and Aids as a public health threat. By the end of March 2024, 96% of people living with HIV knew their status, 79% of these were on antiretroviral treatment and 94% of these were on treatment and were virally suppressed conditions. [Applause.] To ensure that we reach the target of 95-95-95, which has been set by the World Health Organisation, we will this year launch a massive campaign to look for an additional 1,1 million people who are not yet on treatment.

We are concerned about the potential impact of the decision by the United States government to suspend some of its funding for HIV and TB programmes in African countries for 90 days. This funding that we get accounts for about 17% of our

country's HIV spend. We have been able, over the years, to provide funding from our own resources – our own fiscus – for our HIV and TB programmes. We are looking at various interventions to address the immediate needs and ensure the continuity of the essential services that we might lose if this funding does not come through. [Applause.]

To tackle inequality, we need to undo apartheid spatial planning which has scarred our cities and forced many people to live far away from areas of work and opportunity. We have delivered millions of housing opportunities since 1994, providing safety as well as dignity to poor households. Yet the practice of building housing developments on the periphery of urban centres has in many ways perpetuated inequality and urban sprawl. Going forward, we are going to build more housing in our city centres and closer to places of work and business. [Applause.]

We are redesigning our housing subsidies and directing more funding towards programmes that enable people to buy or rent a home in an area of their choice. We will release more underutilised state properties for affordable housing development. [Applause.] We are working with our provinces and metros. I am glad that a number of our premiers are here as well. We are working with them to reclaim buildings that have

been hijacked in the city centres and repurpose them for public use. [Applause.]

We will provide 300 000 serviced stands to qualifying beneficiaries to enable housing development in well-planned and connected communities along key development corridors. We will clear the backlog of title deeds for subsidised housing, turning homes into household assets. We will review land use, building and other regulations to enable low-cost property development, including backyard housing. This represents a fundamental rethink of how the state delivers housing at scale while turning our cities into engines of growth and opportunity.

In making our cities work for their residents, we will restore the remaining passenger rail corridors and stations to full service. More than 80% of passenger rail corridors have been returned to service. [Applause.] The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, Prasa, has introduced over 200 modern locally produced trains on its network to provide a low-cost option for public transport. Over the next five years, we will restore Prasa's signalling system so that we can put all our new trains to work, and commuters can be assured that they can reach work safely, affordably and on time.

We also want a nation in which everyone is safe. The police continue to work with other law enforcement agencies to dismantle organised crime syndicates and combat financial and violent crimes. The SA Police Service has partnered with the metropolitan municipalities and continues to work with communities to fight crime in the priority provinces where crime is particularly high. [Interjections.] We are intensifying Operation Shanela. Operation Shanela has been successful in arresting suspects, recovering firearms and seizing stolen vehicles. We must continue to tackle the scourge of gun violence that has continued to plague our society for decades. I have asked the Minister and the National Commissioner of Police to prioritise reducing gun-related crime and violence. This includes preventing the diversion of firearms into the illicit market and recovering illegal firearms in circulation. We know from international evidence and our own experience that this is the most effective way to reduce overall violent crime.

The Detective Service, which is crucial to solving cases, will be expanded by 4 000 personnel through internal recruitment processes. We are working on adopting surveillance, analytics and smart policing solutions for modern law enforcement.

We have seen the value of technology in fighting crime. A number of countries that have opted to utilising technology

have made great progress. By using artificial intelligence in its fraud risk detection and verification work, the SA Revenue Service, Sars, has prevented the leakage of over R95 billion in impermissible refunds. It has recovered R20 billion in revenue and dismantled an illicit tobacco and gold scheme.

We continue to work across society to end the violence that is perpetrated against women. We have promulgated the National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Act, establishing a national structure to oversee a co-ordinated response to this crisis. We will ensure that the council is fully functional and properly resourced. We continue to strengthen support to victims of gender-based violence. There are now 65 Thuthuzela Care centres across the country. Out of the 52 districts in our country, 44 have gender-based violence shelters. All police stations in the country now have victim friendly services, and another 16 sexual offences courts will be established in the next financial year.

We want a nation that deals with corruption. Last year, we established the Investigating Directorate Against Corruption as a permanent entity of the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, dedicated to investigating and prosecuting high level corruption. We will ensure that the directorate is fully resourced and has access to the information that it needs to

prosecute state capture cases and hold those responsible to account.

We are establishing a world-class digital forensics laboratory to support the investigation of complex corruption and financial crime. We are making steady progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the State Capture commission, including signing into law several legislative reforms. The Special Investigating Unit and the Asset Forfeiture Unit report that over R10 billion has been recovered in state capture related cases.

This year, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development will report on the review of the anticorruption architecture by the National Anticorruption Advisory Council.

This is expected to streamline legislation, eradicate the duplication of mandates and foster greater co-operation between law enforcement agencies. We will finalise the whistleblower protection framework and introduce the Whistleblower Protections Bill in Parliament during this financial year. This year, we will strengthen South Africa's system of dealing with terror financing and further legislative and system improvements.

To secure our removal from the international Financial Action Task Force grey list, we have made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in our law enforcement system, with 16 out of 22 action items fully addressed.

We want a nation that is at peace with the world. We continue through our international relations to advance the wellbeing of the people of South African people as we seek to advance the wellbeing of humanity.

We will work to strengthen our trade relations around the world and to leverage our strong and diverse global alliances to make our economy more resilient. The key pillars of our foreign policy remain the promotion of human rights, peace and friendship and the strengthening of fair trade and investment ties with other countries. [Applause.] These are the principles that guide our presidency of the G20 this year.

We have chosen the theme of solidarity, equality and sustainable development to underscore the need for co-operation and partnership among the countries of the world.

For the first time in its history, the G20 is being hosted on the African continent. [Applause.] This is particularly important following the admission of the African Union as a member of the G20. It is a great opportunity for us to place

the needs of our continent and the rest of the global south more firmly on the international development agenda. Our G20 presidency is a valuable opportunity for South Africa to advance efforts towards greater global economic growth and sustainable development.

Africa remains at the centre of our foreign policy. We continue to work to strengthen the African Union to support the achievement of peace, development and economic integration on our continent. We know that our future prosperity is inextricably linked and bound to the prosperity of the African continent. For South Africa to thrive we must ensure that Africa does indeed thrive as well. We must silence the guns on our continent. [Applause.] Since the advent of democracy, we have been instrumental in restoring stability in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, South Sudan and Lesotho. More recently, we have been part of the SADC peacekeeping mission in Mozambique that has brought relative calm and stability to the Cabo Delgado province. [Applause.] The presence of South African peacekeepers in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, is testament to our continued commitment to the peaceful resolution of one of the world's most intractable conflicts that has gone on for years and that has cost millions of lives and displaced many people. We call on all parties to embrace the current diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful resolution, including honouring the Luanda Process.

We will attend the joint summit between SADC and the East African Community scheduled to take place in Tanzania this weekend, where we will reiterate our call for a ceasefire and a resumption of talks to find a just and enduring solution. We will make sure that our boys – our soldiers – do come back home.

We have always believed that the freedom we won, and the international solidarity from which we benefited, does impose a duty on us to support the struggles of those who continue to experience colonialism and oppression.

South Africa continues to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine who have endured decades of illegal occupation, and they are now experiencing indescribable suffering. South Africa has acted in accordance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention by instituting proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice. We are fully committed to the articles of the United Nations, including the principle that all members should settle their international disputes by peaceful means. We support the principle of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states and peoples. [Applause.]

We continue to participate in the various peace processes seeking to bring about a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

The South African delegations have been instrumental in developing a framework for negotiations towards a just peace in Ukraine based on the UN Charter and international law.

Our country continues to advance its agenda of co-operation and multilateralism through its membership of the United Nations, the African Union, the nonaligned movement, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Brics, and a number of other international bodies.

As humanity confronts unprecedented challenges, we are determined that a reformed and representative United Nations must be at the centre of global affairs. We will continue to push for progress on the reform of the UN Security Council to be a more inclusive and a more effective body that is able to ensure peace and security. We will work to ensure that the needs of the people of the world are advanced.

The work that we do and what we stand for does needs to be explained to many key players, especially to our trading partners and many countries and leaders that we interact with on the global stage.

With a view to explaining the positions that we have taken and in particular the objectives that we wish to achieve during our presidency of the G20, I have decided to send a delegation

of government and other leaders to various capitals on our continent and across the world. This delegation will interact with various key players on a variety of matters that affect South Africa's interests. I will direct that they leave as soon as possible to interact with various key players on our continent and in the world so that our presidency of the G20 objectives can be well explained.

All of these things that we speak of are possible. As South Africans, we know the power of co-operation, of what is possible when people of different backgrounds, different races, cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religions come together behind a shared objective. [Applause.]

The formation of the government of national unity provides us with an opportunity to show once again what we can achieve by working together. I call on all South Africans – united in our diversity – to come together in the national dialogue that we are going to have to define a vision for our country for the next 30 years. The national dialogue must be a place in which everyone has a voice. It must be a place to find solutions that make a real difference in people's lives. The dialogue must reaffirm that each and every one of us has a role to play in building the nation we want. We must therefore be builders and not people who seek to destroy the future of South Africans. [Applause.]

While we may differ on many issues, we agree on one thing: We need to build a better South Africa and improve the wellbeing of our people. We should do so not by sitting on the sidelines and shouting, but we should be in the scrum working to develop the lives of our people.

And so, as we enter a new era in the world and in our own country, let us speak of the empathy and compassion that we have for one another. Let us speak of the pride that we have for our country and all that we have achieved. Let us speak of the determination that won us freedom and drives us forward now to a better future. With this determination, we will work together to make this an era of growth, progress and transformation. We will work together to build the nation that we want. We will only be able to do it by working together and not by shouting together. [Applause.] We will only be able to do it by ensuring that that we as the leaders ensure that those who would come after us – our children and our grandchildren – inherit a country that we have helped to build, and not to destroy. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces adjourned the Joint Sitting at 20:27.