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MINI PLENARY - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (VIRTUAL)

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**PROCEEDINGS OF MINI PLENARY SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

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Members of the mini plenary session met on the virtual platform at 10:00.

House Chairperson Mr C T Frolick took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

House Chairperson Mr C T Frolick announced that the virtual mini plenary sitting constituted a meeting of the National Assembly.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AD HOC COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF APARTHEID-ERA STATUTES AND MEMORIALS IN PUBLIC SPACES**

(Draft Resolution)

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon members, the first item on the Order Paper is the motion in the name of the hon J S Malema. I have been informed that the hon N J Nolutshungu will

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take charge of the motion on behalf of the hon Malema. I now recognise the hon Nolutshungu.

Ms N J NOLUTSHUNGU: Hon House Chair, please allow me not to switch on my video, I have a network problem.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): I understand, please proceed hon member.

Ms N J NOLUTSHUNGU: Hon House Chair, hon Members of Parliament, we rise today to confront the unresolved question of colonial memory and its poisonous symbols. Across South Africa, in front of this very Parliament and in the heart of Tshwane, statues of colonial conquerors and apartheid leaders stand unchallenged. They are not neutral symbols of history, they are monuments of colonialism and material reminders that, although the political regime of apartheid has been formally defeated, the ideological, cultural and economic structures of conquest remained intact.

A statue is never innocent. It is a form of political communication. A claim to space. A declaration of who belongs and who does not. In the language of decolonial scholars, statues of colonisers are an imposition of power, reminding us of how

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European conquest is normalised, celebrated and reproduced across generations.

When you arrive at this Parliament, you are confronted by the statue of Louis Botha. He is glorified as a statesman, yet in reality, he was a general of violence, a Prime Minister of white supremacy and the defender of racial segregation. His statue stands here to remind us that the Parliament we occupy today was never meant for the African majority. That statue communicates that, we as African people, remain visitors in our own legislative Chambers.

In Tshwane, the Paul Kruger statue sits arrogantly at the Union Buildings, taking pride of place at the seat of the postdemocratic government. In Cape Town, the statue of Jan van Riebeeck still stands on the foreshore, celebrating the very beginning of colonial conquest in 1652. At the University of Cape Town, the statue of the land thief, Cecil John Rhodes once looked down arrogantly over African students, until the brave Rhodes Must Fall Movement of 2015 forced its removal.

Yet, across Kimberley and in Cape Town's Company's Garden Rhodes is still honoured. In Durban, Cape Town and Gqeberha, statues of Queen Victoria still decorate city centres, when under her reign,

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Africans were conquered, killed and dispossessed across the continent in the name of British Empire. Today, the Voortrekker Monument continues to tower over our nation's capital, a tribute to white supremacy built to glorify the so-called civilising mission of Voortrekkers, when in fact they were armed invaders who seized land from African kingdom ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon member, my apologies for that. Hon Swarts, will you please mute your microphone? If the member can't mute, please remove the member from the platform. Please proceed hon member. Thank you.

Ms N J NOLUTSHUNGU: In Makhanda, the Settlers Monument continues to celebrate the European settlers who displaced Xhosa communities, erasing their heroism of African resistance. Hon members, these statues are a celebration of the conquest of Africans. They are trophies erected not to tell history, but to legitimise colonial occupation. That is why they were placed in city centres, in front of Parliament, on the highest hills, so that every African child growing up under colonialism would look up and see his or her oppressor portrayed as a hero.

Today, 30 years into democracy, these conquerors remain on their pedestals while the African people remain landless, jobless and

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hungry. That is not a coincidence. The presence of these statues reflects the persistence of oppression in the present. The dispossession they represent has not been undone, and the economic system they created where the wealth of the land is concentrated in a few white hands remains in place. As a result, the humiliation of African people continues materially in the conditions of poverty, and symbolically in the monuments that decorate our public space. This is wide.

Decolonisation is more than just land restitution or economic justice, it is also about reclaiming our spaces of memory, our symbols, our narratives. As long as Rhodes, Kruger and Botha occupy the central spaces of our cities, they continue to dominate our cultural imagination and continue the violence of raising our heroes and elevating our oppressors.

Let us ask ourselves: Where are the statues of Chief Maqoma who resisted colonial invasion in the Eastern Cape? Where is the monument of King Hintsa, brutally murdered by British soldiers? Where do we honour King Moshoeshoe or the warriors of Isandlwana, who defeated the British in 1879? These heroes are either absent, hidden in provincial museums, or relegated to the margins of our heritage. Meanwhile, the colonisers occupy the most prestigious

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sites of our nation, privileging of colonial history over African.

Some will argue that these statues are part of our history. But whose history? For the African majority, they are not history, they are wounds left open. They are symbols that continue to tell us, we are conquered, that we are inferior and that we are tolerated in our own land. Heritage must be about dignity and liberation, not humiliation.

Hon members, decolonisation demands that we do more than remove these statues. It demands that we recentre the African memory in our public spaces. Imagine approaching this Parliament and being greeted by a monument of Solomon Mahlangu, who declared that his blood would nourish the tree of freedom in South Africa. Imagine Church Square transformed into space that honours the Marikana workers who died demanding a living wage. Imagine our cities adorned with the names and images of those who resisted the slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

We must also challenge the hypocrisy of those who claim that removing colonial statues is an attack on history. History is preserved in museums, archives, books and classrooms. However, to elevate a coloniser in the heart of a democratic city does not

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preserve history but simply continues domination by allowing the conqueror to rule from the grave. Therefore, hon members, the EFF says, let us begin the true decolonisation of our public spaces. Remove Louis Botha from Parliament. Remove Paul Kruger from Pretoria. Remove Rhodes from every pedestal. Let us dismantle the colonial geography of memory and build a new landscape of African dignity.

In conclusion, we must understand that the struggle against statues is part of the broader struggle for African liberation. It is connected to land, wealth, education and power. As long as the conquerors remain immortalised in stone, the African people remain symbolically conquered. Therefore, let us finish the unfinished business of liberation. Let us tear down these monuments of humiliation and replace them with monuments of our own heroes. Only then, can you walk through our cities and feel pride and not shame. Thank you, House Chair.

Mr M DLELANGA: Good morning, House Chair and hon members. Thank you very much for this opportunity. Allow me - based on the network issues - not to show my video. I stand before this House today to address one of the most fundamental question of our post-apartheid democracy on how we transform our heritage

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landscape to reflect the true aspirations of the South African people.

The discussion over apartheid and the colonial statues is not merely about bronze and stone, it is about the national question itself, the very core of our national democratic revolution, the theory of the national question as articulated by the ANC over decades, recognises that South Africa represent colonisation of a special type where both the coloniser and the colonised share the same geographic space.

This unique condition demands that our national democratic revolution addresses the antagonistic condition between the oppressed majority and their historical oppressors while simultaneously resolving the national grievance arising from the colonial relations. The national operation operates not only at the material level but also at a super structural level of consciousness, feelings and perceptions. This is precisely why the continued presence of apartheid and colonial statues in our public spaces represents more than symbolic violence. It is a material emasculation of unresolved national contradiction.

The heritage landscape has always been a battlefield for competing narratives on nationhood under colonial and apartheid

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rule. Statues and the naming of public spaces served as an instrument of subjugation deliberately designed to alienate African voices while affirming white supremacy and domination. Every monument to Jan van Riebeeck, every tribute to Hendrick Verwoerd was strategically placed to entrench a particular vision of whose history mattered. The towering statues of Louis Botha outside Parliament is perhaps the most daring example of this symbolic violence.

Here stands the man who must bear responsibility for the 1913 Native Land Act with ... [Inaudible.] ... land to Africans in the 1990s of their own country. Yet, they command their entrance to the people's Parliament. The location of these statues matters, hon Chair. Our public spaces must be a representation of our identity, values and what we honour. Directly replacing these colonial and apartheid statues in entrance spaces such as the entrance of Parliament or a university, is an act of symbolic violence and send the wrong message that oppressors and land thieves can stand tall at the face and heart of our democratic institutions.

This contradicts the very spirit of the Freedom Charter, our Constitution and undermines our strives towards social cohesion and nation-building. This is why Cecil John Rhodes statue had to

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fall at the University of Cape Town and it is why as the ANC we are calling for the statue of Pieter Botha which stand tall at the entrance of Parliament to also fall.

We call for the statue of Louis Botha to be placed in a less prominent area with historical content curated or placed at a museum. This is a call not for the erasure of history, but rather for its responsible reconceptualisation. Chairperson, our response to this contested terrain must be grounded in the foundational principles of our democracy. The Freedom Charter declaration that, South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white together does not mean that all historical narratives deserve equal celebration in our public spaces.

Nonracialism is not the erasure of social injustice, or the pretence that all perspectives are equally valid, rather, it is an active contraction of the South African identity that acknowledges our painful past while building towards unity in diversity. The Constitution's commitment to human dignity demand that we create a public space where all South Africans walk with their heads held high. When young black South Africans past statues celebrating those who deny their grandparents basic human right, we perpetuate the very division that our democracy was meant to heal.

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We must be honest about the pain inflicted by the continued presence of these monuments to oppression. Our approach to heritage transformation is not new or reactive, it is grounded in the decades of a clear policy articulation. In our Ready to Govern document of 1992, we envisaged a flourishing cultural life vital to South African ... [Inaudible.] ... where arts, culture and heritage would serve nation-building and democratic national identity creation.

Our national conference in particular the 5th conference took a decisive position resolving that apartheid and colonial statues should be removed or replaced through consultative processes. This resolution recognised the need to balance historical preservation with democratic transformation and social cohesion imperatives. We are not vandals seeking to destroy history. We are democrats seeking to democratise our heritage landscape.

The opposition has consistently mischaracterised our position presenting it as a choice between preservation and destruction. This is a false dichotomy revealing their inability to grasp the complexity of the national question. Our approach recognises the difference between removal and repositioning, between erasure and contextualisation. Some monuments may require removal from

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prominent public spaces. Why? They are calling to inflict symbolic violence on our citizens.

The Louis Botha statue outside of Parliament is one such example. It cannot be contextualised in a way that eliminates its symbolic violence in that location. Its removal will be an act of democratic ideal, clearing the space for new monuments and resetting our political values. Other statues may be repositioned to less prominent positions, museums or heritage sites where they can serve educational purposes within proper historical context. This approach preserves historical artefacts while ending their functions as monument to oppression.

Museums can present complex historical narratives acknowledging the full context of colonial and apartheid figures without celebrating them. The repositioning of apartheid statues to museum is not punishment, it is contextualisation. Our commitment to consultative processes reflects our democratic values and the understanding that heritage transformation must be a collective undertaking. However, consultation does not mean capitulation to those who preserve apartheid monuments in their current form. It means engaging communities, heritage professionals and affected stakeholders in determining how best to achieve our shared goal of transformed heritage and reflecting democratic values.

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Transformation of our heritage landscape is fundamental and about advancing healing, unity and social cohesion. This is not about punishing the past, it is about creating a future where all South Africans can see themselves reflected in their public spaces. Every statue at a democratic era erected, every colonial monument contextualised, every apartheid symbol removed from a position of honour, represent a step towards the nonracial and nonsexist democratic society envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

Some in this House, like the DA, have wrongly argued that statues removal creates sanitised public spaces reflecting government approved history. This argument fundamentally misunderstands public monuments' nature. All public monuments ... [Inaudible.] ... whose history and celebrated choice. In conclusion as the ANC, we reject the proposal for ad hoc committee, instead, we call the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture to expedite the process on the work done and report to the Parliament. Thank you very much, hon Chair. [Time expired.]

Mr E M NTSHINGILA: Good morning hon House Chairperson and hon members. I ask your permission not to switch on my video due to connectivity issues in my current location.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): You may proceed hon member.

Mr E M NTSHINGILA: Hon House Chairperson, the MK party rises to express its full support for the Draft Resolution before this House. We do so not simply as a matter for symbolic correction. However, as a matter of national healing, dignity and Afrocentric transformation. The resolution correctly notes that 31 years into democracy our public spaces remain the ... [Inaudible.] ... symbols of oppression.

These statues, memorials and names are not neutral objects, they are daily reminders of oppression, humiliation and subjugation. They perpetuate the mental harm of apartheid by keeping the perpetrators of crime against humanity, curved in bronze, stone and marble on the very soil from which they stripped our people with dignity.

This House must be honest with itself, we cannot built genuine unity, cohesion and pride while we ask majority to walk past monuments that glorify their tormentors. Our democratic spaces cannot remain museums of colonial conquest.

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The MK party has long argued this point as early as April 2025 in the Cubic's Forum. We table a position that calls for a structural programme of Afrocentric transformation within the Peoples Parliament and beyond. The programme made clear that the statues and symbols of oppression must be removed from places of honour and relocated to facilities where they can be engaged with consciously historically and educational rather than confronted daily as instruments of dehumanisation. This resolution echoes and affirms that call.

Hon members, our perspective goes deeper than that deeper than what is characterised by the DA. The question before us is not only what we remove but, what we elevate in the first place. A vacuum of identity is dangerous.

The MK party insist that the removal of apartheid symbols must be accompanied by the celebration and elevation of African heritage, African leadership and African values.

This is why we have spoken about a Parliament that reflects the soul of its people an Afrocentric Parliament. We have proposed that the Good Hope Chamber be renamed the Ubuntu Chamber so that our deliberations are guided not by colonial conquest but by the principle of Ubuntu that "I am because we are."

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We proposed that the bell be replaced by an African drum calling us to order not with important clangs of iron but with the heart bit of this continent.

We have called for the replacement for the replacement of the statue of Louis Botha a symbol of colonial violence with the monument of the Khoi and the San leaders such as David Stuurman, Harry die Strandloper or ... [Inaudible.] In doing so we would not erase history but correct it. We would inscribe in stone the truth that this land was not discovered on Friday 1652 when settlers landed in the Table Bay led by Jan Van Riebeeck.

We have argued that the Speaker's procession marked by silence should be led by Imbongi [Praise poet.] a praise poet calling upon the traditions to dignify the authority of this House.

We have set that our state of the nation address should begin with a debate with the ancestors acknowledging that governance does not rest on the shoulders of Europe but on the shoulders of those who resisted dispossession from the hills of Isandlwana to the streets of Soweto.

Hon House Chairperson, the resolution before us today must be understood in its broader spirits. The removal of apartheid

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symbols must not be approached as a grudging administrative exercise, but it must be seized as an opportunity for national renewal an opportunity to build a South Africa where our children do not grow up admiring statues of those who murdered their forefathers but instead are inspired by monuments that honour those who resisted belt and died for freedom.

The MK party does not call for a destruction of these symbols they must be preserved but preserved in places of learning where their role in oppression is confronted honestly. What we reject is their continued dominance over our democratic landscape.

Therefore, hon members, the MK party supports this resolution wholeheartedly. We call on all members of this House to support it not as an act of partisan but as an act of justice, of dignity and an act of healing.

Let us establish the ad hoc committee and let us hear the voices of our people across provinces. Let us work with the Heritage Council and cultural institutions. However, above all let us all have a courage to say apartheid has no place of honour in a democratic South Africa. We remind this House that the preamble of our Constitution commits us to heal the divisions of the past. Healing requires not only economic transformation, not only land

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restitution but also cultural reclamation walk proudly into the future. We must root our symbols out of humiliation and plant in their place a symbol of our pride.

In conclusion, hon members, the MK party stands ready to contribute constructively to this process bringing to the table our Afrocentric proposals that were first resented in April. We do so with a firm conviction that a Parliament, a nation and a people anchored in African values will never again be marginalised in the land of their birth. We support this resolution. I thank you.

Mr W A S AUCAMP: Hon House Chairperson, our Constitution is the framework for reconciliation. Not a lot has been said about our Constitution today. The preamble of our Constitution is that and I quote:

We the people of South Africa recognise the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

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Hon House Chairperson, this preamble is instructive. It does not call on us to erase or demolish parts of our past. It does not call on us to diminish or exclude instead it asks us to recognise injustices to honour those who fought for freedom and equally to respect those who contributed to building our country. It emphasises the fact that we are united in our diversity. These are not mere words on paper. They are a promise to every South African that our diversity will be embraced and that we will build unity not by erasure but by recognition.

The DA cannot support this motion brought by the hon Malema. Not because we deny our painful history, not because we are blind to the injustices of apartheid. No hon House Chairperson, we oppose it is an unnecessary divisive and costly destruction from the real challenges facing South Africa today.

Hon members, statues and memorials are not mere pieces of stone and bronze as it has been said here this morning. They are physical markers of history. Sometimes painful, sometimes glorious but always a reminder of where we have come from. The very presence of apartheid era memorials does not glorify apartheid, rather it offers a mirror into our past and a reminder of how far we have come.

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The DA firmly believes in nation-building. Removing or moving statues, tearing down memorials or the renaming of every town and every street will not build a nation. On the contrary it will seek and redress the deepening racial divisions that the hon Malema and the EFF have consistently sought to exploit for racial and political gain.

Hon House Chairperson, we cannot build a united South Africa by erasing our history. Nation-building is not about denial; it is about inclusion. It is about recognising the full breath of our history both the painful and the proud chapters.

When the EFF seeks to remove these statues and memorials, they are not advancing unity they are sowing further discourse. They are dragging us back into the us versus them mentality that has no place in democratic South Africa.

Hon House Chairperson, if you look beyond our borders, we find countless examples of societies that chose to preserve history rather than to erase it. In Germany for instance, remnants of the Berlin Wall still stand today! Not because anyone wishes to glorify division but because they serve as an enduring reminder of the dangers of ideological extremism.

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In Eastern Europe, statues and memorials from the communist era remain in public spaces so that new generations can know and understand the past rather than to be shielded from it. South Africa too must follow this path of maturity. We cannot allow ourselves to believe that by demolishing or moving a statue or memorial we demolish the injustices of history. History does not work that way.

Hon House Chairperson, what makes this debate so troubling is the context in which it is raised. Our nation today is facing an unprecedented crisis. Over 32% of our people are unemployed. Our young people especially have little hope of finding work. Corruption has hollowed up our institutions. Service delivery has collapsed in municipalities across the country. Millions of children go to bed hungry every night. Our health care system is under a lot of severe strain and service delivery is but a pipedream.

Hon members, in this context should this Parliament priorities be pouring scares public funds into an ad hoc committee to discuss whether the statues or memorials should be torn down or moved? Or should we as Parliament put our time and money towards the upliftment of our people?

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The DA say that South Africans deserve a Parliament that is focussed on the real struggles of the people of this country such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, hunger, corruption and failing municipalities.

Let me carry on, we should not spend our time on politically driven symbolic gestures that change nothing about the lived reality of our people. Let us also speak frankly about costs, removing or the moving of statues and memorials and the renaming of towns and the rebranding of public spaces is not free! It requires millions of rands. This is money that should be spend on fixing potholes, schools, providing water and sanitation, repairing hospitals and creating job opportunities instead of wasting it on what amounts to be political theatre.

Hon House Chairperson, the real moral question before us is whether we can look a hungry child in the eye and say to him or her that we could have provided them with a meal but instead we as Parliament opted to spend the money on the renaming of a street or a removal of a memorial. That would be a disgrace!

Hon House Chairperson, the DA proposes a different approach. Rather than tearing down, let us build. Rather than erasing let us add. Let us go and build a monument at Marikana without having

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to tear down other monuments. Let us erect new statues and new memorials that honour the heroes of our democracy. Let us build a landscape where our public spaces reflect the full tapestry of our history. This approach recognises our diversity. It honours our Constitution, and it will build our national story one that reflects the preamble of our Constitution that says that South Africa belongs to all who live in it; united in our diversity.

In conclusion, hon House Chairperson, the hon Malema and the EFF's motion is not about unity. It is also not about justice, and it is definitely not about building a better South Africa. Instead, it is about political posturing, deepening divisions and it is about destruction. The DA will not support the establishment of the ad hoc committee. We will instead continue to fight for jobs, growth, service delivery, safety and the opportunity for all South Africans to live here because that is what truly matters.

Hon House Chairperson, let us not waste time and money on erasing our past. Let us spend our time and our resources on building a future for every South African that truly deserves a better chance. I thank you.

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Mr N M HADEBE: Hon House Chair, the IFP notes the motion for the establishment yet another ad hoc committee. While the subject of our heritage is undeniable important, the proliferation of ad hoc committees raises a serious concern of fruitless and wasteful expenditure at a time when our country is facing socioeconomic challenges. The IFP has been clear, monuments that illustrate our divided past should not be dismantled or erased, but rather repositioned and contextualised so that future generations may remember and learn. The late IFP founder, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, often reminded us that:

It is said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. They serve as a crucial reference point in our nation's collective memory, as they not only remind us of where we come from, but also of the sacrifices made, the mistakes, as well as the triumphs that have shaped our democracy.

Therefore, to erase them means creating gaps in our national story. Furthermore, the fixation on forming new committees for issues already ventilated in this House does not serve our people well. Millions of South Africans are poverty-stricken, unemployed, and lack basic services, yet we continue to sink resources into structures whose recommendations too often gather dust. The IFP maintains that the transformation of our heritage

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landscape must be inclusive, balanced, and reflective of our entire nation's story, not biased towards any single narrative. If the objective is genuine nation-building, then the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture already has the mandate and expertise to lead this process transparently in consultation with communities, historians, and traditional leaders, inclusive of sub-programmes such as relocation of statues, legacy projects, and heritage policies, and legislation for the preservation, conservation, and management of South African heritage. To duplicate this work through a new ad hoc committee is unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible.

Heritage should be a bridge, not a battlefield. Every Rand must be stretched to serve the people, not lost to inefficiency, duplications, or poor planning. Wasteful expenditure erodes the very resources meant to build schools, hospitals, infrastructure, and jobs. The IFP therefore calls for utilising existing institutions effectively for education purposes, so that history is presented in its totality, and to channel limited resources towards pressing priorities that restore dignity through service delivery, not duplicative committees. I thank you.

Ms M L MATHOPA: Hon House Chair, hon members, the PA rises today not to defend the past, but to defend the future. We acknowledge

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the pain and the injustice of apartheid. We honour the struggle of our people, but we reject the politics of destruction and division. The resolution before us, proposed by hon Malema, seeks to establish an ad hoc committee to investigate apartheid era statues and memorials. Let us be clear, this is not about justice. It is about ideological theatre. It is about symbolic battles that do not feed the hungry, do not house the homeless, and do not protect our women and children from crime.

We do not support the indiscriminate removal of historical statues. We support conceptualisation. Let the statues stand, not as glorification, but as reminders of what we overcame.

Let us add plaques, educational displays and counter monuments that tell the full story. We must teach our children how far we have come, not erase the evidence of where we started. Removing statues does not remove inequality. It does not remove corruption. It does not remove failure of leadership. While some debate statues, we debate crime, unemployment and illegal immigration. Hon Lonzi made a statement yesterday that the township economy is not owned by South Africans and how they are being charged. Is it not the very illegal foreigners you are calling your brothers who owns it?

*IsiXhosa:*

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Sisame kuloo ndawo, asibhatyazi. Mabahambe!

*English:*

The PA calls for mandatory national service for youth, zero tolerance for violent crime and economic empowerment through industrialisation and land access. We are building a South Africa where every citizen matters, not just those who shout the loudest. We do not need more committees. We need more action. Let us not forget the same voices calling for statue removals are silent on corruption and service delivery. They weaponize history while ignoring the present.

Hon Gayton McKenzie has defended symbols like the springbok, not because they are perfect, but because they unite South Africans across the race and class. We must stop dividing our people over symbols and start uniting them over solutions. The Minister is being attacked because he closed some types of corruption. We are not afraid to defend our people's dignity and we are not afraid to say leave the statues but change the system. Let us build museums, not committees. Let us build jobs, not ideological battlegrounds. Let us build a South Africa where history is remembered but never repeated. Just yesterday, you were all embracing diversity culture and talking about building, uniting

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and Ubuntu. Was that just a show? Let us build and not break. I thank you, Chair.

Dr C P MULDER: Honourable Chairperson, the economy is not growing. Unemployment is more than 33%. South Africans are desperate for jobs and the opportunity to earn a decent wage. However, the EFF had the hon Nolutshungu want to rather debate the presence of the apartheid era statues and memorials. They did not bring a subject for discussion today but they brought a draft resolution to once again to try to trick the ANC and other parties, just like they did way back four years ago with the section 25 debate on expropriation and property rights.

Why is this relevant? The hon member from the EFF who spoke referred to a number of examples, amongst them President Paul Kruger in front of the Union Buildings. There's no statue of President Paul Kruger in front of the Union Buildings. She also said that these statues make her feel inferior. No one can make you feel inferior but yourself. King Dinizulu kaCetywayo was born in 1868. By 1884, Zibhebhu kaMaphitha, attacked the young king who was only 16 at the time. He asked the British to help but none came. It was General Louis Botha and the Boers who came to the rescue of the young king. In 1906, after the Bhambatha Rebellion took place, King Dinizulu was accused by the British of

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being the alleged instigator of the Bhambatha Rebellion. He was found guilty by the British of high treason and sentenced to prison in 1908.

However, in 1910, when South Africa became a union, his old friend General Louis Botha, who then became Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, in one of the first things that he did was to release King Dinizulu from prison immediately. Today, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, on the corner of Berea Road and Warwick Avenue, there are two statues facing each other. One, of General Louis Botha and the other, of King Dinizulu kaCetywayo celebrating their friendship. That is the same General Louis Botha who the EFF wants to take down.

In South Africa today we have builders and breakers. If I listen to this debate, luckily the majority are builders who positively want to recognise the reality of our history but also then to build and give recognition to our new heroes and our new statesmen and that we will support. There are breakers who want to try and defeat everything what happened in the past also in terms of history but that will make no difference to the fact that our economy is not growing and that our people do not have jobs. The FF Plus does not support this resolution. Let us get busy building and moving South Africa forward and those who want

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to break will be taken back to the extinction of our political society. Thank you, Sir.

Ms M P KOBE: House Chair, ActionSA agrees that the work of building a nation that truly represents all its people is far from complete. We continue to grapple with the powerful legacies of our very painful past, and one of those legacies is the nature of our shared public spaces and heritage. Transforming these spaces into ones that reflect our democratic, nonracial and rights-based dispensation is indeed an important and noble goal, and ActionSA's position is clear on this matter. We support efforts to make these changes, but we must also recognise that while changing statues and monuments that may form part of this process, it is not an end. Replacing a statue does not change the lived realities of our people, House Chair. These realities are defined by poverty, unemployment and crime.

We must ask ourselves: Will a statue lift a family out of poverty? The answer is no. Will a statue put food on the table? Again, no. Will a statue stop the rampage of gangs on the Cape Flats? No, and this is the harsh reality. Can a statue and our shared public spaces shape how people view themselves in a free and democratic society? The answer is yes, and this is the tension that this House must carefully and soberly confront.

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While ActionSA is not opposed to revisiting our public spaces that reflect our democratic ideals, we question whether this should sit at the very top of Parliament's many priorities, with millions of South Africans struggling daily for dignity, opportunity and safety, we must carefully balance symbolism with substance.

Furthermore, ActionSA does not believe that establishing an entirely new ad hoc committee, as proposed by the EFF, is necessary. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, public spaces and statues are governed by the National Heritage Resources Act, NHRA. The real problem is not the absence of legislation here, but the chronic underfunding of the National Heritage Resource Agency, which is tasked with carrying out this important work. Parliament should, therefore, prioritise adequately funding this agency, rather than creating an entirely new committee. Secondly, Parliament already has a dedicated Portfolio Committee on Sports, Arts and Culture, which is fully equipped to deal with these matters. It is far more efficient, more responsible and more respectful of the limited resources of our state to place this agenda within the mandate of that committee, rather than duplicating efforts.

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Hon House Chair, let us reimagine our public spaces to be reflective of all the South Africans and capacitate the existing structures to do this work, while never losing sight to the urgent work to substantively transform the lives of our people first. Thank you very much, House Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): The next speaker is hon Maimela. Is the hon member on the platform, the hon Maimela?

Ms K J MAIMELA: Thank you, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Please proceed, hon member.

Ms K J MAIMELA: Hon House Chair, and good morning to all members who are on the platform. Chair, I am also going to just request not to do my camera because of network challenges. The ANC has long understood that the National Democratic Revolution, NDR, is about addressing the unresolved national question and creating a united, nonracial, nonsexist and democratic society. Our heritage landscape remains contested because of the colonial and apartheid legacies continue to manifest in monuments that glorify white supremacy and racial domination. When we see statues of Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr, Maria Van Rebeeck and other symbols of

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oppression standing prominently in our public spaces, we are reminded that the transformation project we started in 1994 remains incomplete. The ANC's position clearly distinguishes between the removal and repositioning of contested heritage. We do not support blanket destruction. Our approach is nuanced and consultative.

Former Minister, Nathi Mthethwa, captured our position well when referring to colonial and apartheid statues stating that, we want to keep them in a museum, not destroy them, because our policy of reconciliation is that we should forgive each other, but never forget. The ANC resolved that apartheid and colonial statues should be removed or replaced with proposals that have been reached through a consultative process. This demonstrates our commitment to dialogue while maintaining the principle that symbols of oppression cannot continue dominating our public spaces.

In appreciating the context that has brought this debate forward. We acknowledge the work of the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, working with the SA Heritage Resources Agency, SAHRA, and the SA Geographical Names Council, SAGNC, amongst other essential structures and stakeholders to implement comprehensive programmes of audit systems and policy instruments that have

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demonstrated ongoing work to safeguard, transform and memorialise South Africa's heritage in line with our constitutional values.

To this end, the SAHRA publishes reports on the state of the National Cultural Heritage. In 2021, the agency successfully conducted a national audit of all statues that are not in line with the values of the Constitution, where approximately 1 153 heritage monuments and statues were identified. However, despite knowing where and how many statues need to be removed or repositioned, limited resources have altered implementation. The transformation of our heritage landscape cannot stop at merely removing and repositioning oppressive symbols. We must also be concerned with actively creating narratives that celebrate our struggle, resistance and resilience. The Resistance and Liberation Heritage Route, RLHR, which our 55th ANC national conference resolved to expedite demonstrate this positive agenda. We must ask: Whose statue should we build, and why? Our public spaces should celebrate heroes like Oliver Tambo, Albertina Sisulu, Chris Hani and other icons of the liberation struggle.

The recent discussion about erecting Solomon Mahlangu statue in Pretoria, Church Square, represents exactly this type of transformative memorialisation. We also note the imperative role of youth voices in transforming our heritage landscape, as

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demonstrated by movements like #RhodesMustFall, and campaign surrounding the Steyn statue. The University of the Free State's removal of Marthinus Steyn statue, following students protests and vandalism, demonstrates how active citizens are in reshaping heritage decision-making, as well as contributing to shaping a just representative and inclusive South Africa. This grassroots movement forced institutions to confront uncomfortable truths about their symbolic landscapes and lay a blueprint for the type of South Africa future generations will inherit from us. Research, science and innovation are equally important in this discussion.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, 4IR, presents unprecedented opportunities for heritage transformation and preservation. Digital technologies can document, preserve and disseminate indigenous knowledge systems that colonial education deliberately suppressed. Our partnership with the National Research Foundation, NRF, must prioritise research into African Knowledge Systems, AKS, oral histories and archives of the liberation struggle. Digital preservation techniques can capture testimonies from the struggle veterans before we lose these living treasures forever. We must ensure that IKs are integrated into heritage, research and documentation. The systematic exclusion of African innovations in metallurgy, agriculture and construction from our

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educational curricula represents a form of cultural colonialism that technology can help us to reverse.

Our current heritage landscape suffers from severe geographic and gender imbalances. Public monuments concentrated where most liberations activities occurred remain unmarked. What comes out of this debate is how the gender dimensions, particularly stuck. The artist, Sethembile Msezane's powerful live performance during the Rhodes statue removal, highlighted how statues of white imperialists and black liberationists exclude women change-makers from being celebrated in our public spaces. When only male histories receive public commemoration, we send dangerous messages to young women about their place in society. We need to celebrate women like Lilian Ngoyi and Dorothy Nyembe as active architects of freedom, whose stories and contributions to the ... [Inaudible.] ... is represented. The geographic equity requires that province, district and ... [Inaudible.] ... liberation struggles. The Eastern Cape's role in producing liberation leaders, KwaZulu-Natal ... the tradition and Limpopo's ... [Inaudible.] ... must receive proper recognition through strategically located monuments and heritage sites.

This debate about apartheid statues reflects the broader unresolved national question that continues to define our post-

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apartheid South Africa. We cannot achieve genuine nonracialism, while symbols of racial supremacy dominate our public spaces. We cannot build social cohesion while monuments glorify those who designed our oppression. The transformation of our heritage landscape is not about erasing history, it is about ensuring that our public spaces reflect the democratic values enshrined in our Constitution. When we remove statues ... [Inaudible.] ... of Lindiwe Mabuza, when we replace the statue of Kruger with the statue of Charlotte Maxeke, we are not destroying the past, we are reclaiming our future. The South Africans are demanding nothing less than the complete transformation of our symbolic landscape. Every statue that falls, every monument that rises, and every heritage site that receives proper recognition represents progress towards a nonracial, nonsexist and democracy for which our comrades died.

Let us, therefore, approach this transformation with the same revolutionary determination that brought us freedom. The struggle for heritage transformation, like the broader national question continues, until every South African can walk through our public spaces and see themselves reflected with dignity, respect and pride. I thank you, House Chair.

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Mr L MPHITHI: House Chair, the historical mission handed over to us by our democracy's founders is to pursue a truly transformed, inclusive society based on reconciliation.

Lasting reconciliation requires the commitment of society to unite in its diversity and a capable state that promotes substantive equality by expanding opportunities for all citizens. Redress and transformation are not a single populist event, and it cannot be driven by anger, hate, or what the EFF wants us to do right now, which is erasure. As a society, we need to decide whether the destruction of monuments truly reflects the immediate needs of the South African population and, further, whether this conversation prompts an inclusive vision for the future of our society.

This inclusive vision can only be achieved through constructive dialogue that recognises the pain of our past and creatively reimagines our public spaces. Of course, it is easier to destroy than to build or to create. It is easier for us to focus on statues and monuments than to rise to the intellectual challenge of addressing poverty and the shocking lack of jobs and basic service delivery that is failed to be delivered in our municipalities each and every day. Blaming our lack of progress

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on statues that have stood for more than a century undermines the true cause of transformation in our society.

What is truly disappointing about this topic is that it has completely given up on the pressing issues that are affecting South Africans in our country. It is a drift-away from the pressing issues like policing, education, and health. These services remain fundamentally unequal, whilst the small elite continues to thrive, and ordinary South Africans continue to suffer. South Africans want us to find solutions to the pressing challenges of today. We are here to solve the problems of our time.

If we are to use the EFF's logic, we would simply forget the daily cries of the people of this country who are also ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon Mphithi, please switch off your video because your connection is not good, and then you can continue.

Mr W A S AUCAMP: Chairperson, if I may come in on a point there?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Yes, hon member.

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Mr W A S AUCAMP: Chairperson, I think it might be ...

Mr L MPHITHI: Chairperson, am I audible?

Mr W A S AUCAMP: Chairperson, I think it might be your connection that is not good. We can see and hear the hon Mphithi very clearly.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Alright. I've asked the member to switch ... Hon Aucamp, I am chairing this session. I've asked the member, and I am communicating with the Table staff, to switch off his video so that I can also follow what he has to say. Thank you. Please proceed, hon Mphithi.

Mr L MPHITHI: House Chair, if we are to use the EFF's logic, we would simply forget the daily cries of the people of this country who are asking us to focus on economic growth in order for their businesses to grow, who are asking us to focus on basic water and basic services so that they have water in their taps, electricity in their homes, street lights outside, potholes being filled, a working public transport system, safer communities, and hospitals that deliver quality health care.

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If we were to follow the EFF's logic, dealing with history would be like editing a film. We would simply cut out the parts that we don't like, like erasing parts of a movie that we don't like because it represents a past that we don't agree with. It would simply just be something that is untenable. Where would it start, and where would it end? Is erasing history really how we confront the past? We don't think so.

We would do well in this House to remember the words of Chief Justice Pius Langa in his 2006 speech on transformative constitutionalism, where he says:

There is no right way to deal with the immense violation that was apartheid. But, as a society, we must keep alive the hope that we can move beyond our past. That requires both a remembering and a forgetting. We must remember what it is that brought us here. But at the same time we must forget the hate and anger that fuelled some of our activities if we are to avoid returning to the same cycle of violence and oppression.

The public purse must and should focus on the pressing issues that are facing South Africans. The South African people do not have time to wait any longer for government to do its work. The

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question that South Africans want us to ask, want us to confront, is not about monuments. It is not about statues.

It's about how we are going to turn this country around. It is how we are going to respond to the youth unemployment crisis.

The DA remains committed to the constitutional vision of a transformed society and the project of reconciliation and nation-building. We believe this is a cause worth fighting for in the face of rising populism and nationalism that threaten to undermine the freedoms that have been fought for for such a long time. This debate, and this motion in particular, is as useful as a fork in soup. It takes us nowhere in answering the generational question of our time and, quite frankly, it fails to read the room. Therefore, we reject this ad hoc committee with what it deserves. Thank you very much, Chairperson.

Dr K M N GIGABA: Chair, hon members, in his 1978 pamphlet, *The Historical Injustice*, President Mbeki posits that all societies are indelibly shaped by their history, bearing the birthmarks of their past. This logic dictates that colonial system profoundly imprinted itself on the post-independence state. Our task, therefore, is not only to dismantle the legacy of tyranny, but to

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forge a new synthesis characterised by genuine equality, justice and inclusion.

While President Mbeki addressed apartheid colonialism specifically, this principle applies equally to micro-aspects of society, like culture, heritage and public symbols. This is critically important because, as Frantz Fanon argues, colonialism actively destroys and distorts the past of the oppressed to justify its domination. Imposing its own symbols and values to suggest that it brought enlightenment to a savage people.

In South Africa, apartheid era symbols represent both the white ruling bloc's internal struggles for domination, as well as the ongoing humiliation of the black majority. The pre-1994 landscape was a deliberate project to glorify white supremacy and erase black history. The continued presence of these symbols perpetuates a narrative of inferiority and keeps the painful legacy of domination alive.

This debate summons us to restore our people's dignity by reclaiming our public consciousness and ability to define ourselves independently of our colonial past. This is an act of liberation that involves both economic transformation as well as the transformation of cultural superstructures like public

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symbols. Our approach must be guided by the two truths from President Mbeki, that South Africa bears the imprint of its history, and that our identity is woven from the experiences of everyone who calls this land home.

While we cannot erase history, we must collectively decide to what extent we allow these bad marks to continue defining our public memory today and going forward. This decision should be driven by a commitment to the aspirations of the historically humiliated majority, while also recognising that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, and that we seek to build a new society antithetical to apartheid. The ANC's official view is that South Africa's heritage landscape must be transformed to reflect a unified, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic nation.

The transformation of our national heritage is therefore fundamental to the ongoing effort to build a new nation, underpinned by social justice and inclusion. That process inexorably compels us to answer critical questions about the kind of new society we wish to create, and how to forge a shared identity from our diverse population and a painful past.

The ANC accordingly advocates for a transformative approach centred on restorative, not retributive, justice, premised on

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correcting historical imbalances, promoting dialogue, and advancing social justice without erasing the past.

Our goal ... [Interjections.] ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon Gigaba, my apologies. Hon Deputy Minister Nzuza, switch off your microphone. If the hon Deputy Minister cannot mute himself, remove him from the platform, please. Thank you. Please proceed, hon Gigaba.

Dr K M N GIGABA: Thank you, Chair. Our goal is to build a society of mutual respect and universal human rights that restores the dignity of all people. Key elements of this approach include, one, symbolic justice, removing statues of colonial and apartheid figures, such as Cecil John Rhodes and Paul Kruger, is a necessary step to dismantle the visual architecture of oppression.

Secondly, inclusive heritage. Replacing old symbols with those that celebrate the liberation struggle, pre-colonial history, and the contributions of all South Africans. And thirdly, policy framework. Supporting government policies that provide the legal framework for managing this heritage transformation.

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The ANC believes that relocating certain statues to museums, where they can be properly contextualised as part of a painful history rather than celebrated, is itself a significant act of reconciliation. It acknowledges the pain of those humiliated by these figures, these statues, honour.

We take pride in the significant progress made over the past 30 years. Initiatives such as renaming streets, building new monuments like the Freedom Park, and establishing museums like the Nelson Mandela Museum, which have honoured previously marginalised figures and reflected our democratic values.

However, we acknowledge that progress has been slower than desired due to resource constraints and poor coordination. True national healing requires honest dialogue and reconciliation across all racial and ethnic groups. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that our heritage landscape unites us, allowing every South African to see themselves reflected in it and to take pride in our shared identity.

This requires that those for whom the colonial and apartheid systems were established also possess the courage to confront the past and genuinely admit to the pain caused by that legacy on the

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majority and have the courage of conviction to support efforts to change that past as a measure of reconciliation and justice.

Therefore, while the ANC unequivocally supports transforming the heritage landscape as essential, it believes this must be first pursued through the processes already underway in the Department of Sport, Arts, and Culture. Only if we are not satisfied with how comprehensive that process is, can we then propose new mechanisms.

A clear roadmap exists. The national audit has identified non-compliant statutes and the new draft national policy framework provides a plan for their repositioning. Therefore, Parliament must now exercise its oversight role to close the implementation gap. This must involve addressing the urgent issue of apartheid statues and symbols at key public spaces such as Parliament.

The framing of all opposition to transformation as constitutional is grossly misleading. If anything, it perpetuates the violence of oppression and dehumanisation of the majority, entrenches the unequal power relations between the former oppressors and the hitherto oppressed, and at worst, it appropriates our constitution and turns it into a weapon of oppression by using it to entrench the past inequalities. Equally misleading and

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insulting is the false dichotomy created between transforming our heritage and fighting unemployment and poverty.

As if those making this point opportunistically, dare we say, are doing so out of commitment to genuine transformation of South African society through structural transformation and alteration of property relations. Those of us seeking genuine change, those of us who fought against the evil policies and programs of racial tyranny and exclusion of Louis Botha and Paul Kruger, those of us who fought for this new Constitution, which the beneficiaries of apartheid colonialism seek to appropriate for their exclusive benefit, are that committed to not only defending our Constitution, but changing South Africa's economic base as well as its superstructural elements. Reconciliation does not mean closing over the past but confronting it courageously and decisively.

Ms N J NOLUTSHUNGU: House Chair, please allow me to first express my lack of surprise by certain political parties and their concerns to the debate we have raised today. It has always been clear that there are elements in this country that perceive racism and hatred of African people as part of their heritage.

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It has always been clear to us as the EFF that certain political parties and their representatives perceive the proceeds of the land theft and the pain we suffer as Africans as part of something worth celebrating because their identity is built of conquest.

The EFF debate is not about disagreeing with the past. It is to characterise the past correctly and to not celebrate and glorify perpetrators of land theft and genocide. There is no unity in a state of Jan Van Riebeeck at the centre of society. There is no pride in glorifying voortrekkers who disrupted African life and today have their descendants claiming rights to the land of the people.

It is no surprise that Africans are deployed to undermine the value of this debate from the ranks of the DA because that is the value they add amongst their African members, mere deployees to nullify the genuine pain of those they seek to continue to oppress.

Symbolism means something and that is why organisations who are dominated by the white minority in the country fight to allow them to exist amongst us. It is not a question of money or service delivery because if it was, then the same political

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parties who govern the misery in Mitchell's Plain, Khayelitsha, Delft and not have an objection.

They fight because they know our fight is against being mocked by conquest. Our unemployment and landless begins with a conquest, the very conquest that is rubber stamped by statues in celebration of those who invaded our land. We must not be apologetic about celebrating our resistance and this includes removing from public celebrations the murderers who created the inequality which exists today.

This is Africa, the Africa of King Hintsa, Africa of King Sekhukhune, Queen Zinga, King Cetshwayo, Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe will not retreat. Murderers do not belong in public spaces. They must go and they will go. I thank you. Thank you.

Debate concluded.

**STRENGTHENING DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE, EXPANDING BROADBAND AND CLOUD ACCESS, AND INVESTING IN AI LITERACY AND FUTURE-FIT SKILLS**

(Subject for Discussion)

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Mr V A NKOSI: Hon House Chair, hon members, fellow South Africans, today, as we gather to deliberate on a matter of profound importance for our nation's future, that is to strengthen digital infrastructure and future-ready skills, we confront the relentless march of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 4IR.

It is imperative that South Africa not only keeps pace, but leverages this technological wave to propel our country towards sustainable development, economic growth and social equity. We are living in an era characterised by rapid technological transformation, which is driven by digital innovation that is reshaping every facet of human life economically, socially and politically.

Hon House Chair, our participation in the global technological revolution must be deliberate and strategic. South Africa's position as a democracy founded on principles of social justice and equality aligns closely with the objectives of the digital era, which offers avenues to address historical inequalities through inclusive growth.

The ANC, with its unwavering commitment to the creation of a society based on equal rights ... and equal opportunity,

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recognises that advancing digital transformation is critical to realising our vision of a just and equitable nation.

The recent research by Naspers and Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, *Mistra*, highlights the significant untapped potential of South Africa's digital platform economy, which encompasses online platforms that facilitate economic transactions, such as Takealot.com, Mr D, Superbalist, AutoTrader, Property24 and PayU have made substantial contributions to the economy and have generated over R13 billion in economic value, including R1,5 billion in household income based on 2022 data.

This sector presents a transformative opportunity for the country, with projections indicating that it could inject R91,4 billion into the economy by 2035 and create as many as 340 000 jobs, representing substantial growth. This growth will see the sector contribution expand from 0,2% of gross domestic product, GDP, to an estimated expansion of 1,38% by 2035. This signifies its importance as a driver of economic development and innovation.

Hon members, South Africa's digital platform businesses have the capacity to revolutionise service delivery, create jobs and

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stimulate entrepreneurship across various sectors. By fostering an enabling environment for these platforms to thrive through improved internet access, regulatory support, and investment in digital skills, the country can harness this sector's growth to enhance economic inclusivity and competitiveness.

Embracing the digital platform economy, therefore, is a strategic pathway to unlocking new sources of growth and ensuring that more citizens benefit from South Africa's digital transformation. By supporting the digital economy, we can democratise economic participation, empower entrepreneurs and stimulate local industries, translating into tangible benefits for the ordinary South African.

In alignment with our policy stands inclusive growth. We must ensure that small businesses, particularly those run by women, youth and people with disabilities, are provided with affordable access to digital tools and platforms that enable them to thrive both locally and in international markets. Currently, the Takealot Group has empowered over 12 000 small businesses through its marketplace platform.

The digital architectural alignment with government initiatives and funding demonstrates a tangible move towards digital

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equitable inclusion, ensuring broader access to digital services. Broadband Infracore, the state-owned company, plays a crucial role in expanding infrastructure reach, especially in underdeserved areas. The integration fosters digital inclusion, promotes economic growth and bridges the digital divide across communities. The transformation hinges on expanding high-speed broadband connectivity across the country, reaching both urban centres and rural areas.

Our vision is to ensure that no South African is left behind in the digital age. A digitally connected nation paves the way for more efficient service delivery, better educational opportunities and increased economic participation. To achieve this, we must invest in upgrading our national broadband infrastructure, fostering public-private partnership to build sustainable, scalable digital networks. Connectivity is no longer a luxury but a necessity, an infrastructural backbone that underpins all future development efforts.

Furthermore, the development of robust cloud computing platforms is essential to support research and innovation. By upgrading our national cloud infrastructure, we can facilitate data sharing, accelerate scientific breakthroughs, and enable government and industry to harness data-driven insights for smaller decision-

makings. Similarly, investing in the next generation data centres will also boost our digital resilience, ensuring that critical services remain operational amidst increasing cyber fraud and global disruptions.

Hon House Chair, the Independent Communications Authority of SA's, Icasa, State of the Information and Communications Technology, ICT, Sector Report of 2024 highlights significant progress in data penetration, reflecting ongoing prioritisation of ICT development.

Since the 4IR has been embraced for some time, these advancements suggest tangible impacts and increased digital inclusion. It is evident that concerted efforts have yielded noticeable progress worth acknowledging.

In tandem with the infrastructural enhancements, we must prioritise developing nationwide artificial intelligence literacy programmes targeting students, professionals and entrepreneurs. Artificial intelligence is transforming industries such as health care, agriculture, manufacturing and finance, equipping our youth and workplaces with the skills required to operate, develop and innovate. Artificial intelligence will position South Africa as a competitive player in the global digital economy.

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In line with the ANC policy position on education and skills development, our government must support vocational training initiatives that align with emerging technological trends. Hon House Chair, skills development in the digital realm must extend beyond traditional education systems. It should involve fostering a culture of continuous learning in fields like robotics, data science, blockchain, cybersecurity and digital marketing. Training programmes should be accessible, flexible and tailored to meet industry needs, ensuring that our workplaces remain adaptable in the rapidly changing technological landscape.

We also recognise that youth-driven innovations hold immense potential, hence, supporting the youth-led startups and incubators focused on science and technology sectors should be a national priority.

Public-private partnerships will play a vital role in building the necessary digital infrastructure and skills ecosystem. By fostering collaboration among government agencies, academia, industry and civil society - such as the research partnership with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in Gauteng, the University of the Western Cape, collaboration with the government departments in the Western Cape and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Initiative in KwaZulu-Natal - we can

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develop innovative solutions to persistent challenges. These partnerships can facilitate the deployment of emerging technologies, increase investment in research and development, and promote knowledge sharing.

Moreover, policy frameworks must ensure equitable access to digital tools and resources. The digital divide exacerbates inequalities, particularly affecting the rural communities, women, persons with disabilities and historically disadvantaged groups in general. It is our responsibility to implement policies that guarantee universal access, affordability and digital literacy. This includes subsidising internet access, promoting affordable devices and integrating digital skills and trading into education and social programmes.

We must not allow development of the communications and digital sector to further entrench poverty, inequality, unemployment and a history of economic exclusion. We are called to harness technology, not mainly for economic growth but as an instrument of social transformation in ensuring that digital progress benefits every citizen, regardless of race, gender or geographical location. By investing in infrastructure, education and innovation, we can position South Africa as a leader in the

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4IR and secure a prosperous, equitable future for our beloved nation. Thank you, hon Chair.

Mr A NCHABALENG: Hon Speaker, thank you so much, the MKP takes the opportunity to notify the nation that ... the nations that are able to turn their economic misfortunes are those that optimise necessary interventions to sift the economic standing of their countries. Countries around the world. Governments are moving at speeds to invest in digital infrastructure and broadband. Cloud technology and artificial intelligence are equipping their citizens with future-fit skills to survive and thrive in the new economy. This is not only strengthening their capacity as nations but also fuels economic reforms and research and development.

South Africa has not moved with the agency. The moment required millions of South Africans, especially the youth, women and those in rural areas, to remain excluded from opportunities of the digital age. Therefore, as MKP, we must focus on the strengthening of digital infrastructure, expanding broadband and cloud access and investing in AI literacy and future-fit skills. We must do so under the broader imperatives of tackling unemployment, driving economic growth, and transforming education and boosting research and development.

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On strengthening digital infrastructure, infrastructure is the backbone of a modern economy and without infrastructure such as fibre, mobile towers and data centres, we cannot grow. Yet millions remain disconnected. In rural areas, connectivity is patchy or in nonexistence. Schools cannot provide e-learning small businesses cannot trade online, and government clinics cannot modernise services. The rollout of South Africa's SA Connect Phase 2 meant to connect schools, clinics, and communities has been repeatedly delayed. Budgets are left unspent. Every delay is another learner's unable to study online. Another entrepreneur denied access to markets and another community locked out of the opportunity.

Failure to go further, the post bank, meant to be a lifeline, has been crippled by a system crash and governance crisis. Grant recipients, mainly elderly women and people with disabilities, queue for hours only to leave empty-handed. Technology that should have empowered our people is underutilised and Sita, the State Information Technology Agency, continues to face criticism for inefficiency and an outdated system, slowing down governments' ability to lead in digital services. It is our strong view as MKP that strengthening digital infrastructure is not optional. It is the foundation for reducing unemployment, fighting inequality and lifting people out of poverty. Without

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it, our economy cannot grow, our education system cannot modernise, and our researchers cannot compete globally.

Regarding expanding broadband and strengthening cloud systems, broadband expansion is not just about technology. It is about economic growth and jobs. A ten per cent increase in broadband access can add up to two per cent in GDP growth. Other African nations are moving forward. Kenya has revolutionised financial services with modern mobile money; Rwanda has rolled out community wi-fi zones and Nigeria's tech startups are attracting global investment. But South Africa is far behind. Data remains too expensive. Rural schools and clinics are offline, and community networks are scarce. Government continues to fail to regulate data pricing to improve access for the poor. Choosing instead to leave millions excluded.

Cloud technology is equally important. It powers government e-services, enables universities to do advanced research, and allows small businesses to innovate and scale. Without affordability, an affordable, secure, sovereign cloud system, South Africa cannot build an inclusive economy. This is where cyber employment becomes critical with affordable broadband and a strong cloud system. We can create new forms of work such as remote jobs, online services, digital entrepreneurs, cyber

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employment, facilitate businesses, open new opportunities, enhance communication and accelerate product development. It is a lifeline for unemployed youth who are locked out of the traditional labour market, and here Brics partnerships are invaluable. India has built a digital identity system that serves over a billion people. Brazil is using cloud and AI to boost agriculture. Russia has integrated AI literacy nationally. China has developed smart cities powered by a domestic cloud network. Yet South Africa has failed to leverage these partnerships efficiently. This failure has caused us growth, jobs and innovation.

On investing in AI literacy and future-fit skills, the infrastructure alone is not enough. We must prepare our people to use it. Artificial intelligence is already reshaping industries. It helps doctors detect diseases earlier. It helps farmers predict weather and improve yields and it helps entrepreneurs market their products globally. But without skills, South Africa will remain a consumer of AI, not a creator of it. AI literacy must be declared a national priority, just as literacy and numeracy became the foundation of education. Today we must do the same for coding, digital literacy, and artificial intelligence. AI literacy also reduces information asymmetry. When ordinary South Africans understand AI tools, they make better decisions,

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access accurate information and avoid exploitation, and without this knowledge, the poor remain trapped while the wealthy thrive. This must start in schools where coding and robotics should be part of their core curricula from an early age. It must extend to communities through digital hubs, coding academies, and innovation labs in townships and rural areas, and it must include our workforce with reskilling and lifelong learning to prepare people for industries that are still emerging.

As South Africa, we can cut a leaf from our Brics partners. India has a nationwide AI skills initiative. Brazil has a government, and university training partnerships. Russia has launched an AI literacy campaign reaching millions. These examples show what is possible when there is a political will. On everyday impact, imagine a girl in Limpopo who, with broadband, learns coding online and becomes a sort of software engineer. Imagine a farmer in the Free State who uses cloud-based weather apps to increase harvest and income. Imagine an entrepreneur in Khayelitsha who uses AI tools to make market products globally. Imagine a researcher in Devon collaborating with colleagues worldwide through high-speed cloud access. These are not just theoretical frameworks, but they are happening elsewhere in Africa and across Brics nation. But here in South Africa, we have a President that

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cares not about the poor, but rather lyrical waxes about the DA he has campaigned for instead of service delivery.

In our closing, as MKP, we understand that the digital future is here. It is one of the tools that we can utilise to fight against unemployment, inequality and poverty. It is therefore a must that we strengthen digital infrastructure and expand broadband, regulate data pricing and invest in clouds of renting. To grow our economy, we must embrace cyber employment and learn from our Brics partners. To prepare our children, we must embed AI literacy in education. To innovate, we must increase investment in research and development. As MKP, we demand these initiatives, but we know that we have a government that would rather invest millions in the national dialogue than improve the lives of our people.

This government has failed to invest in digital literacy, has failed to regulate data pricing, and has failed to expand broadband to the poor and has failed to build the partnership that could change lives. As a result, the MKP demands that this government prioritises digital skills, digital technology, AI, and we need to change the lives of our people and create jobs, just like we currently attend Parliament online. The same should happen for our future young South Africans to access this digital

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technology space and enjoy their ability to create income, wealth as well as make sure that they improve their lives and can participate in South Africa's economy through digital access. The MKP submits. Thank you, Chairperson.

Mr S I SUBRATHIE: House Chair, good morning to yourself and to speakers and to hon members.

*Arabic:*

As-salamu alaykum.

*English:*

House Chair, allow me to begin by reflecting on the recent Government Technology, GovTech, 2025 conference hosted by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies and the State Information Technology Agency SOC Ltd, SITA, from 8 to 10 September 2025. This conference stands as a pivotal moment in our nation's digital transformation journey under the theme, "One Data, One Citizen, One Citizen Service Journey - Digital Transformation." The conference championed a shift from fragmented silos to integrated citizen-centric systems. The discussions from this conference powerfully highlighted how artificial intelligence and automation can transform efficiency and inclusiveness.

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House Chair, as a nation, we need to recognize that connectivity is a crucial force in modern society. Communication and digital technology drive economic development and advances national growth as outlined in the National Development Plan, NDP.

The digital divide highlights a disparity in technological access, creating a separation that distinguishes those who can participate in the global economy from those who remain marginalized.

Now, in this moment, House Chair, we must recognize the significant role that the SA Connect project, an initiative by the ANC government, designed as a fundamental strategy to establish a capable, ethical, and developmental state prepared for the future.

Hon members, this initiative serves as the foundation of our collective mission to ensure that every South African, regardless of their location or financial situation, possesses the necessary resources and skills to succeed in the digital era.

Hon House Chair, the digital technology landscape serves as a foundational infrastructure of the modern digital economy, which is a very integral realization. This landscape provides the vital

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connectivity and platforms for integration and global competitiveness, especially in an environment where we do not have a comparative advantage. We must level the playing field as it does possess this potential. We must not perpetuate our continued underdevelopment. However, its transformative potential remains fundamentally constrained without a workforce equipped with future-fit skills. By strategically aligning the rollout of advanced technologies with comprehensive skills development, we ensure that the digital economy evolves in an inclusive and in a sustainable manner.

The launch of the SA Connect emerged as a strategic long-term initiative by the ANC-led Ministry aimed at addressing the need to close the digital access gap. This project signified a deliberate and impactful action by the government to recognize broadband internet as a fundamental public utility. The project's vision extends beyond the installation of cables and towers. Its fundamental aim is to create an interconnected digital framework that links our government institutions, thereby significantly enhancing service delivery and fostering active citizen participation. The achievement of this vision relies on a strong infrastructure deployment. In this context, state institutions such as broadband Infracore are essential in delivering the

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national infrastructure that facilitates data transmission throughout the country.

Hon members, a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders is crucial to addressing the infrastructure challenges. Mobile Network Operators, MNOs, play a vital role in enhancing our digital framework.

On June 13, 2025, we invited the MNOs to Parliament and probed them on their role in digital infrastructure rollout and access programmes. Their vast networks and financial resources play a crucial role in accelerating implementation, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. Now, the government's responsibility lies in crafting a supportive policy and regulatory framework that motivates private entities to deepen their investments whilst ensuring that their business aims align with the overarching national vision of universal service and access.

Hon members, the impactful use of institutions such as the Universal Service Access Agency of South Africa, USASA, and the Universal Service Access Fund, USAF, is essential. These entities should be purposefully utilized to support infrastructure in challenging regions and significantly to enhance digital literacy and skills initiatives.

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As the ANC, we remain firm in championing the principle that USAF must be utilized not only for its physical assets, but for the intellectual capabilities that drive innovation and change. Empowering our citizens is the most impactful investment we can pursue. This is where the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa, NEMISA, assumes a crucial role in the rollout. Again, as the ANC, we continue to see NEMISA as a leader in charge to equip our workforce with the necessary skills to navigate the impending AI revolution.

Hon members, NEMISA is tasked to be one of the driving forces behind a new wave of South Africans equipped with skills in digital content creation, data analytics, cloud computing, and the fundamental of machine learning ready to embrace the challenges and possibilities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This endeavour for the 4IR change demands a unified approach. It is essential for government, the private sector, and civil society to unite behind government's efforts to secure adequate investment in AI literacy and future for skills. At the core of these government initiatives lies the imperative to establish a competent, principled, and progressive governance framework. This entails ensuring that our state-owned enterprises operate efficiently and are aligned with their intended objectives. The envisioned state digital infrastructure company must evolve into

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a dynamic and proficient organization dedicated to implementing our national broadband strategy. We envision it as functioning with a commitment to both commercial rigor and technical superiority to oversee the state's portion of the network infrastructure effectively.

In our ongoing quest to build a capable, ethical, and developmental state, we must also safeguard our digital economy. The significance of data sovereignty in achieving effective governance is central to the concept of democracy in this new digital age. Our national data and that of our citizens must be stored and managed in accordance with the South African law and jurisdiction, protecting it from foreign surveillance and ensuring that our digital economy benefits our people first.

Our principles as the ANC are further reflected in the Audio and Audio-Visual Content Services Bill. The Bill is a vital part of securing our digital infrastructure, promoting local content, creating jobs and leveraging the digital economy and thereby protecting our digital identity as uniquely South African. Now our primary objective is to implement infrastructure for universal connectivity. Without this essential groundwork, hon members, every other strategy remains abstract. This rollout is pivotal for our economic resurgence under the ANC. Access to

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digital resources is a pathway to financial empowerment. This establishes the foundation of executing the digital economy master plan, which unifies these elements into a cohesive national strategy for growth and job creation.

Hon House Chair, our trajectory ahead is guided by the insights of the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The commission called upon us to prioritise human capital first and foremost, also to recognise the urgency of creating a digital infrastructure society. The commission also called for the need to cultivate a regulatory landscape that encourages innovation. Access and growth of the digital market must mean that a larger market means the ability to lower data costs to ensure access.

The SA Connect embodies the essence of our guidance. It is our collective mission to ensure technological advancement benefits every South African. Through building infrastructure and encouraging collaboration, we are creating a more impressive and resilient South Africa, a South Africa that is ready to take the lead in the digital era.

I must commend Postbank on ensuring that it's gone on for 18 months without any penalty for the SA Social Security Agency,

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SASSA, such as delivering on its mandate to bring services to our people. I must also indicate that when I visited the GovTech, I managed to have my own digital ID created by SITA and we're hoping that that will be rolled out soon. Let us advance, hon members, united with determination and trust. Thank you, hon House Chairperson.

Ms T K BODLANI: House Chairperson, hon members, ...

*Setswana:*

... bagolo dumelang.

*English:*

Hon members, I am certain we have all heard these words before: South Africa needs to sharpen its innovative edge and continue contributing to global scientific and technological advancement. This requires greater investment in research and development, better use of existing resources, and more nimble institutions that facilitate innovation, including enhancing co-operation between public science and technology institutions and the private sector. These, hon members, are words straight out of the National Development Plan 2030, a document which was meant to be a blueprint of all our developmental agendas.

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As the topic today is both topical and timely, we note that this week, the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation revealed in Parliament that only 15% of the National Development Plan, NDP, targets are on track to be met by 2030. The question we should ask is, has South Africa achieved anything in developing digital infrastructure? The answer is a yes with a disclaimer. Simply because the investment from the fiscus does not match the benefits to the citizens. The fact is, over the past 30 years, our country has not done enough to develop its digital infrastructure, at least not at the pace that is matching our global development counterparts.

In addition, a lack of political poor planning and systematic corruption have robbed many citizens of the ability to enjoy the rewards of our political freedoms. We have had Ministers repeating political platitudes such as Fourth Industrial Revolution, 4IR, without meaningful implementation of the same. For the DA, strengthening digital infrastructure is not and should never be a focus of a single government department, especially considering the overreaching nature of the NDP goals, which are growing the economy, eliminating poverty, and reducing inequality.

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The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, through successive administrations, has also contributed to holding South Africa back. To this end, the seventh administration has inherited a lagging SA Connect project which received the go ahead in 2013 with very little to show today. Over the years, a lack of project management and capacity has delayed the implementation of this program. Added to this is a poor relationship between the government and the private sector, preventing effective partnerships.

It is for this reason that we welcome the announcement by Communications and Digital Technologies Minister Solly Malatsi that Cabinet has endorsed South Africa's digital transformation roadmap, which promotes a whole-of-government plan aligned with Phase Two of Operation Vulindlela. This move, coupled with fit-for-purpose leadership, will ensure that expanding broadband and cloud access are not abstract contracts, but are tangible for citizens, especially our young people.

The DA's ICT policy warns that South Africa needs to rapidly embrace advanced manufacturing approaches to improve competitiveness and arrest further job losses and de-industrialization, which is likely to emerge as a result of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is therefore crucial that

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collaboration with the private sector, universities, and non-for-profit organizations is strengthened by our government.

Transformation and redress remain high on the agenda of the DA.

Minister Malatsi has made the bold and decisive decision to amend the regulations governing State Information Technology Agency, Sita, to allow departments to procure outside the agency. This is a step towards a more competitive ecosystem that improves digital and service delivery for citizens while safeguarding our governance standards.

The DA welcomes Minister Malatsi's launch of cyber labs in underserved communities, offering robotics, coding, and device repair training, tools fit for a digital economy. It is initiatives such as these that will drive inclusive digital access to unlock opportunities. Further, it is important that the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies streamlines its reporting entities to both better manage state resources and to understand where the gaps are. One such example is the acquisition of BBI by Sentech. which was first announced in 2021, and so far, the plans remain dormant.

As the DA seeks to turbocharge our economy to create jobs, we reiterate our calls for this merger and others to continue

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without a delay. We acknowledge that rationalisation of these entities requires amendment to acts of Parliament. It is for this reason that we call on the Minister to provide the ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Bodlani, your time has expired. You can finish your sentence.

Ms T K BODLANI: Thank you, House Chairperson.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): You can finish.

Ms T K BODLANI: Chair, the DA will continue to work on innovative ways to enhance investment, and we will not be deterred by cadres that want to delay South Africa by protecting policies such as Black Economic Empowerment, BEE. I do thank you.

Dr S S THEMBEKWAYO: Chairperson, this debate is proper, but it must be made simple and connected to the real concerns of our people. We cannot speak about artificial intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution when the cost of the data in South Africa remains among the highest in the world. We know who is breaking the law by charging these exorbitant costs, but the regulator shows no interest in intervening to protect consumers. The consequence is that millions of South Africans are left

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behind in the digital age, unable to participate fully in opportunities that technology should provide.

Artificial intelligence should not be treated as a distant concept that excites only the privileged. It must be a tool that responds to the socio-economic crisis our people face every day. South Africa live without collapsing water infrastructure, potholes on every road, growing food insecurity and the harsh reality of joblessness. If Artificial Intelligence, AI, is to matter in this country, it must be applied to make water provision more efficient, to help municipalities detect and fix infrastructure problems faster, to reduce water in the food system, and to create new forms of work and entrepreneurship for the unemployed.

Despite some progress in expanding broadband infrastructure, affordable internet still remains a major barrier, particularly for low-income households. This affordability gap deepens the digital divide and undermines inclusive socio-economic development. Many households in rural areas and informal settlements still do not have reliable internet access. While mobile devices are the main modes of access, the cost of data, remains prohibitive.

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If South Africa is serious about digital transformation, it must ensure affordable broadband for all, invest in last mile infrastructure, subsidize essential devices like smartphones and laptops, and make e-learning platforms accessible to every student. The regulator must act decisively to bring data prices down in line with global trends so that digital rights become a reality for the majority. The global growth of artificial intelligence also demands higher levels of digital literacy. South Africa's national digital skills strategy outlines how to equip citizens with basic, intermediate, and advanced digital skills, but the gap between the vision and delivery is still wide.

If we do not prioritize investment in digital literacy, the divide between the privileged and the majority will grow even wider. We must train teachers in emerging technologies, invest in digital education, and ensure that no student or job seeker is left behind. Our young people are eager to learn, to innovate, and to create. With the right support, they can build a competitive and inclusive digital economy.

Preparing for the future also requires skills in data science, cybersecurity, software development, robotics, and digital entrepreneurship. These are the skills that will define job

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creation and competitiveness in the global economy. Yet our education system is held back by weak infrastructure, underqualified staff, and a lack of continuous reskilling. We need to direct investment to overcome these challenges, while also supporting small tech startups providing incubation spaces, and linking training to job opportunities. Without this, AI and advanced technologies will benefit only a small elite, while the majority remains excluded.

South Africa can position itself as a leader in the digital economy, but only if digital transformation speaks directly to the struggles of our people. We must bring down the cost of data, expand affordable broadband and cloud access, invest in digital and artificial intelligence literacy for all, equip our youth with future-fit skills, and use AI to resolve the real crisis of water, food, infrastructure, and jobs. This is the only way to ensure that the digital revolution does not leave our people behind but carries them forward into a just and inclusive future. I thank you, Chairperson.

Mr T M LANGA: House Chair, only a few months ago at Voice and Dacom Vodacom, and Ingwenyama Trust Board partnered to build cellular towers in the areas that fall under traditional leaders.

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This is a welcome initiative that seeks to improve mobile connectivity in rural areas.

It is important to raise this point because any conversation about communication in South Africa must confront the stark reality of the digital divide. Millions of South Africans remain excluded from a reliable Internet access, affordable data and modern communication tools, while others enjoy the benefits of a connected world. This gap entrenches inequality, silences voices, and limits opportunities for education, business and civic participation.

However, the IFP agrees that it is essential to strengthen South Africa's digital infrastructure, expand broadband and cloud access, and invest meaningfully in artificial intelligence, AI, literacy and future fit skills.

The reality is that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is not a distant prospect. It is already here, reshaping economies and societies across the globe. It will not pause to wait for South Africa to be ready. And every day it continues to advance an unprecedented pace. If we do not act with agency and foresight, we risk being left behind, widening the digital divide and

missing opportunities for innovation, competitiveness and inclusive growth.

To meet the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the IFP proposes that South Africa must act decisively with four immediate interventions:

First, government must frustrate the rollout of affordable high-speed broadband, especially in rural and township areas by leveraging targeted investment and public private partnerships. Secondly, a national AI and digital skills program, should train students in AI, coding, cloud computing, and data analytics across schools, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, colleges and universities to equip youth with future ready skills. Third, equally important is incentivizing private sector investment through tax breaks and grants to boost digital infrastructure, AI research and innovation hubs for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Finally, policies to strengthen digital inclusion must be urgently implemented, including subsidised Internet access for low-income households, community based digital learning centres and schemes to ensure access to affordable devices.

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These immediate measures will help close the digital divide, enhance competitiveness, and position South Africa to thrive in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Artificial intelligence presents both opportunities and profound risks that South Africa cannot afford to ignore, particularly in relation to jobs, information and elections. The AI threatens to automate many jobs and without rescaling, South Africa's high unemployment could worsen, deepening poverty and inequality.

On information, AI powered tools such as deepfakes and algorithm disinformation can distort public discourse, erode trust in institutions, and exploits South Africa's fragile media environment.

On elections, AI-driven manipulation campaigns have the potential to swerve voter sentiment, suppress participation, and undermine faith in the democratic process. Which is especially dangerous for a young democracy facing deep political contestation.

Without these safeguards, AI could become a destabilizing force that undermines both democracy and economic stability rather than strengthening them. South Africa urgently needs legislation to regulate AI and their well-resourced independent ombudsman

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accountable to Parliament to ensure ethical, transparent and impartial oversight. I thank you very much.

Mr E HENDRICKS: House Chair, hon members, I rise today on behalf of the PA, to speak not of abstract innovation, but of urgent inclusion. Our people want to be included, and that is urgent. Digital infrastructure is essential for freedom, but many communities like Eesterus, Eldorado Park, Bonteheuwel, Cape Flats and beyond, lack connectivity and access. No fibre, no signal, no stake.

Broadband must reach the forgotten first and follow the inequality fault lines with local cooperatives building it to create jobs in our communities. Making connectivity a constitutional right. Cloud access must be local, affordable and sovereign. Our spaza shops, our youth-led startups, our informal traders deserve the same digital tools as any boardroom.

No more outsourcing our data, we build our own, we store our own, we protect our own. The AI literacy should be widespread, reaching all communities and not just coding in Constantia but robotics in Reha Park. Our people are innovators who deserves a role in the future.

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This is not about gadgets, it's about governance, digital sovereignty, economic dignity, educational justice.

The PA advocates for digital inclusion in South Africa. Ensuring every child has Wi-Fi. Entrepreneurs can afford cloud services and ex-offenders receive training, future ready skills, so no one is left behind.

Empowering our people digitally, economically, socially and political empowerment. And that House Chairperson, is true patriotism. I thank you.

Mrs H DENNER: House Chair, digital transformation is not merely a technological shift, but a socioeconomic imperative for South Africa. The rapid development of artificial intelligence is fundamentally altering how businesses operate, how governments deliver services and people interact with technology.

To harness this revolution, we must focus on three critical pillars; strengthening digital infrastructure, expanding broadband and cloud access, and investing in AI, literacy and future fit skills.

A robust digital infrastructure is the backbone of any thriving digital economy. However, we must be clear about the common barriers that impede infrastructure expansion. High capital costs for deploying fiber optic cables, fifth generation, 5G, towers, and data centres often limit private sector investment, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Regulatory hurdles ranging from discriminatory and investment deterrent legislation, slow approval processes, to fragmented spectrum allocation, delaying network rollouts, fraud and corruption, theft and vandalism of infrastructure threaten sustainability. While inadequate energy supply and unreliable electricity further undermine connectivity. Additionally, a shortage of skilled technical workers hampers the maintenance and upgrading of digital networks.

Overcoming these barriers require coordinated policy reforms, public private partnerships, community engagement, deregulation of the private sector, and innovative financing models to ensure no one is left behind.

Beyond infrastructure, universal and affordable broadband access is crucial, particularly for rural and underserved areas.

Initiatives like SI Connect are vital for driving broadband

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expansion, ensuring that all citizens can access opportunities in education, healthcare, and electronic, e-government services.

Supporting cloud migration for government services and small and medium enterprises and encouraging local data centre development will further enhance data sovereignty and security. Yes, we must confront a sobering reality. According to recent studies, 80% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for comprehension. This crisis of foundational literacy is not merely an educational issue; it is a societal emergency. An education system that produces such outcomes cannot, in its current form, equip young people with AI literacy or future fit skills demanded by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

We must therefore invest urgently in teacher training, early childhood development and evidence-based literacy interventions. Only by ensuring that every child can read, write and think critically from an early age can we hope to build a workforce ready for AI, data science and innovation.

Crucially, for these pillars to flourish, we need agile governance and leadership, the rapid disruptions of digital transformation challenge, existing policy and regulatory frameworks.

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By fostering public, private collaboration and financial incentives, we can deregulate the market effectively, allowing easier access for service providers, jobs and skills creators, and ensuring AI benefits all of society.

Let us break down barriers, address our educational crisis and unlock the immense potential of South Africa's digital future. I thank you.

Mr A D BEESLEY: Chair, today, we stand at a crossroads. South Africa's young people are told that they are the future, yet their lived realities tell a different story. For millions, the future has already been stolen by government failures. The numbers do not lie. Among young adults aged between 25 and 34, unemployment has risen from 31% in 2015 to more than 40% this year. Two out of every five young people entering the job market today cannot find work, and this failure is no accident; it is a direct result of bad policy and poor governance.

It is a tariff regime that drives up costs for local manufacturers, leaving them unable to compete internationally. We have erratic foreign policy that alienates trade partners and threatens vital export markets, including the automotive sector, where thousands of jobs are being lost. The crumbling

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infrastructure from Eskom's load shedding to Transnet's broken ports makes it impossible for industry to thrive.

And the very institutions designed to prepare young people for work, the Sector Education and Training Authorities, Setas, have been hollowed out by cadre deployment. Instead of equipping young South Africans with skills, they enrich a small elite with inflated salaries and zero accountability.

While government destroys jobs on the one hand, it withholds the tools and skills our youth need to survive in the modern economy, on the other. We live in a world where the global economy is increasingly online. Our youth cannot afford to remain locked out. Access to affordable, high-quality broadband is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It allows a young person in a township or rural village to design a website for an international client, to sell services online, to teach, to innovate, to code.

However, access alone is not enough. We must equip our youth with AI literacy and future-fit skills, software development, digital marketing, online education and e-commerce. Without these, South African youth are not merely behind, they are excluded from the global race entirely.

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Through the National Development Plan, government has committed that, by 2030, every South African should have easy access to affordable broadband of at least 10 Mbps. Yet, South Africa is nowhere near on track and without urgent investment in digital infrastructure and skills training, we risk condemning an entire generation to poverty and dependency.

The GNU may not be future proof, but our youth must be. This is our collective national responsibility. Every party in the coalition government must own up to the consequences of failure and commit to real change. If the GNU continues down this path, it will sacrifice not only the dreams of our young people, but the very future of our country. But if it acts, if it expands broadband, invests in AI literacy, and reforms our broken skills institutions, we can unleash the creativity, resilience and brilliance of the South African youth. If not this, GNU will be remembered as a government that has killed a generation's hope. Thank you.

Ms C T NONTENJA: Hon House Chair, the injustice of the digital divide remains a harsh reality that entrenches inequality and condemns our young people, especially in rural provinces, to exclusion. This exclusion is not as a result of a lack of talent, but a lack of access.

While the government promised ICT integration in education, many rural schools still lack computer laboratories, reliable internet, and essential digital resources. By the time learners from these communities reach tertiary education, they face an uneven playing field, competing against better equipped urban peers.

Digital inclusion is not about handing out smartphones; it is about equipping our youth with the skills to navigate the digital world safely and effectively. It is about critical thinking, coding, AI literacy, data analytics, and mastering the tools that drive the global economy. Without these skills, our young people remain locked out of opportunities.

The UDM calls on the government to expand broadband, build computer labs, and train young people in both hard technical skills and essential soft skills. This is the pathway to reducing unemployment, growing our economy, and unlocking the potential of an entire generation. To achieve this, investment in digital infrastructure and literacy is critical.

This approach will empower our youth, particularly in provinces that are more rural, stimulate economic growth, and alleviate the burden on government caused by lost productivity. Let us

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prioritise digital inclusion, create real opportunities for our young people, and ensure that no South African is left behind in the digital era. Thank you.

Ms S SINGH: House Chairperson, hon members, as we navigated the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is imperative that we continue to strengthen digital infrastructure, expand broadband and unlock the potential of cloud services for all South Africans. This is not a luxury but a basic need essential for South Africans to access the opportunities available to them.

Unfortunately, successive administrations have not been at the forefront of ensuring that all South Africans have the basic service of connectivity. For years, South Africans have been deafened by promises of universal broadband, yet deadline after deadline has been missed. South Africans left offline are the casualties of past governance failures. A recent report by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, Icasa, highlights the sobering reality and the scale of the challenge inherited by the Seventh administration.

South Africans mostly have to travel to access internet, as only 14,5% of South Africans have fixed internet at home, with many rural districts sitting at an appalling 2%. The DA-run Western

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Cape leads the country having the highest rate of fixed internet at home, at 40,1%. ANC provinces must look at this as a blueprint. South Africans not having internet access at home is an urgent task for the Minister.

While further broadband rollout is underway, we welcome the Minister introducing a tax break on smartphones costing less than R2 500. This is a step in the right direction, opening access to a sector with huge job-creating potential.

The DA welcomes the allocated R710 million over the medium term to roll out broadband. However, we are concerned that the overlapping entities that the Minister has inherited will hamper progress.

In addition to SA Connect - the main entity responsible - there is Broadband Infraco, Sentech and the State Information Technology Agency. It is DA policy that we rationalise these entities, which overstep each other, costing taxpayers more, and little to show in return. We trust the Minister will achieve creating a single effective entity that works with the provinces in rolling out high-speed broadband in homes, schools, police stations and hospitals.

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As this is an ANC-sponsored debate, following the instruction from the President, here is what DA governments have been doing. Take note. In the Western Cape, broadband initiatives in schools and community centres have dramatically increased access. The City of Cape Town has successfully deployed cloud-based municipal services, enhancing both efficiency and accessibility for residents. These successes show that, where the DA leads, results follow. Fibre-to-the-home subscriptions have reached nearly 1,5 million, and 5G coverage has grown to almost 40% of the population.

Under DA leadership, these gains will be scaled nationally, as we seek to govern for all South Africans. To achieve this, the Minister will pursue clear priorities.

One, infrastructure with accountability through rolling out fibre and broadband to rural areas, with set measurable targets and published progress reports.

Secondly, ensuring connectivity is both accessible and affordable, through opening the internet market, accelerating spectrum release and 5G rollout.

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Three, investing in secure, world class cloud services and partner with the private sector to support SMMEs and startups.

The cost of inaction is stark. Digital exclusion entrenches inequality, limits economic growth, and drives talent abroad. But the opportunity is enormous. Imagine every school connected with high-speed broadband, every clinic accessing specialist support online, and every small business reaching global markets via the cloud. These are achievable realities, if we act decisively.

Minister Solly Malatsi has the mandate, the vision and the political will to make this happen. This Parliament must support delivery, demand accountability, and ensure that South Africa not only catches up but leads in the digital era. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will not wait. South Africa must act now, or risk being left behind further. Thank you.

Ms L SAPO: Hon Chair, could you allow me not to show my video because of my connectivity issues?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): That's fine.

Ms L SAPO: The critical imperative of investing in artificial intelligence, AI, and future-fit skills is an undertaking that is

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essential for South Africa to secure sustainable growth and to truly realise the strategic objectives of the national democratic revolution. Now, as we forge ahead in this era defined by technological revolutions and digital transformation, our ability to harness the potential and ... AI will determine our nation's trajectory towards a more inclusive, innovative and resilient economy.

Of course, our journey begins with the recognition that supporting research and development in AI and machine learning is fundamental. It is for this reason that the ANC believes that scientific inquiry and technological innovation are vital drivers of economic progress.

We must prioritise funding to foster research in these cutting-edge domains, ensuring that our universities and research institutions become hubs of excellence in AI. By doing so, we affirm our commitment to a knowledge-based economy rooted in ingenuity and the quest for solutions that serve our people's needs.

While developing university curricula focused on AI, data science and robotics is another cornerstone of this strategy. Our education system must adapt swiftly and ... [Inaudible.] ...

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these subjects into the core ... of the higher education sector. This not only prepares a new generation of skilled workers but also encourages an entrepreneurial mindset and innovative spirit among our young people.

As part of our policies, we should promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, STEM, careers that are accessible to all, especially in marginalised communities, to bridge the digital divide, as per the motto of the *Department of Science, Technology and Innovation*, that of placing science, technology and innovation at the centre of government, education and society at large.

The ANC's policy position emphasises the importance of equitable access to opportunities, ensuring that no youth is left behind in this transformative era.

Now, on the other side, the rapid growth of Shein and Temu has displaced over 8 000 jobs in the South African clothing, textile and footwear industry between 2020 and 2024. To mitigate these job losses, strategists should focus on promoting local e-commerce and digital retail platforms, investing in workforce reskilling programmes tailored to digital skills, and supporting domestic manufacturers through incentives and modernisation

efforts to enhance competitiveness and create sustainable employment opportunities.

So, through catalysed and AI-driven innovations within industry, we must create tangible incentives for partnership between government, academia and industry players.

Such collaborations will accelerate the development and deployment of AI solutions, particularly in sectors critical to our development agenda, including the need to support retail workers facing job losses due to automation and digital transformation. Reskilling these workers is vital to ensure that they adapt to the new roles within the digital economy, while maintaining employment and economic sustainability. Investing in reskilling initiatives can promote inclusive growth and help to mitigate inequalities caused by technological disruptions.

Now, linked to what I raised earlier on, promoting entrepreneurship in AI-driven start-ups is another pillar of the ANC's vision. Micro, small, and medium enterprises, MSMEs, are the engine of growth and employment. Therefore, we must provide the necessary support in terms of access to funding, mentorship and markets to foster innovative AI start-ups that address local challenges.

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Encouraging such entrepreneurs aligns with the policy emphasis on building a capable and vibrant small business sector that can compete globally.

Hence, establishing national standards for AI safety and responsible deployment becomes important to ensure that our technological advancement upholds our constitutional values and social norms.

Now, implementing policies and programmes that promote youth participation in innovation ensures that the next generation is not only consumers but active creators of technological advancement.

Youth-led innovations, competitions and incubation programmes should be integral to our strategy. Investing in AI and preparing our youth with future skills are not mere strategic choices but they are moral imperatives rooted in our fight for social justice, economic equality and national sovereignty.

As a liberation movement committed to building a better South Africa, we recognise that science holds the power to transform lives, create opportunity and ignite hope.

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We must seize the moment with courage and resolve, and ensure that our AI serves the interests of our people, especially the marginalised and vulnerable.

The little that we are not worried about is to go and benchmark in a DA-led province where people in Nyanga and down there in Khayelitsha are still struggling. Thank you very much, Chair.

Mrs N W A MAZZONE: Chairperson Labuschagne, today we speak on a matter that is no longer about the future, but about the now. Artificial Intelligence, AI, is no longer confined to Silicon Valley boardrooms and university halls. It is in our phones, our businesses, our health care, and increasingly, our public services. It is reshaping the global economy, and the countries that embrace it are racing ahead. So, let us ask ourselves, where is South Africa in this race?

If we do not embrace AI with intent and urgency, the consequences will be severe. We risk becoming globally uncompetitive. While other nations automate and scale their economies, we will remain trapped in outdated systems and declining productivity. We will see a deeper digital divide, where only the wealthy and urban elite benefit from AI, while the majority, especially in rural areas, are left behind. And crucially, jobs will be lost, not

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because AI took them, but because we failed to upskill and reskill our people in time. Let me be absolutely clear: the danger is not AI itself; the danger is being unprepared for it. We are already seeing AI being used across Africa to predict crop diseases, improve education outcomes, and power mobile health services. If we delay, we will become consumers of other countries' technologies, instead of creators of our own.

We must now move beyond fear. Too often, the conversation around AI is dominated by doom and gloom: "It will take our jobs," "It will make humans obsolete," "It's too dangerous to touch." This kind of thinking is shortsighted. We don't need to be afraid of AI; we need to understand it, regulate it, and use it responsibly. [Interjections.] Chair, I'm being interrupted.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): You can continue, hon Mazzone.

Mrs N W A MAZZONE: Thank you, Chairperson. With proper safeguards and ethical use, AI can create more jobs than it displaces, especially in new fields like machine learning, robotics, data ethics, and AI system maintenance. AI can make the government more efficient by reducing red tape, improving service delivery, and cutting corruption through smart automation and oversight. AI

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can empower small and medium enterprises by giving entrepreneurs access to tools that used to be reserved for large corporations. The key to unlocking this potential is governance, education, and political will. As a nation and a responsible Parliament, we must develop and pass AI strategies that put South African values, inclusion, and innovation at their core. We should look towards establishing a regulatory body that ensures transparency and ethical use of AI, certainly not one filled with cadres, but with qualified experts.

We must safeguard our citizens by strengthening data rights, algorithmic transparency, and cybersecurity. We must invest in digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas. We cannot have anyone left behind. We must equip our people, especially the youth, with the skills to thrive in a digital economy. We must teach coding like we teach maths. We must teach data literacy like we do reading and writing. Chairperson, South Africans are not afraid of hard work. They are not afraid of change. But they need leadership. They need vision. And they need a government that sees opportunity where others see risk. AI is not here to replace us. It is here to assist us, to amplify our efforts, not erase them. Let us be a nation that does not fear the future. Let us be a nation that shaped it. I thank you.

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Mr V A NKOSI: Hon Chair, hon members, fellow citizens, youth of our nation, as we look to the future, it is clear that strengthening our digital infrastructure is vital to unlocking South Africa's full potential. Expanding broadband connectivity and cloud access across all communities must be prioritised, ensuring that underserved areas such as rural, township, and informal settlements are brought into the digital fold.

Investments in artificial intelligence, literacy, and future fit skills must accompany this infrastructural expansion, empowering our young people to participate meaningfully in a digital economy that promises new opportunities and innovations by equipping youth with the necessary knowledge through targeted training programmes, integration of digital skills in education, and subsidised access to technology, we reinforce our commitment to social emancipation and economic transformation. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between government departments and public entities is essential to ensure that these efforts are coordinated, efficient, and impactful. We call upon all stakeholders to work together in designing and implementing initiatives that leverage technology to reduce inequalities and create pathways for youth to thrive. It is crucial to involve young people actively in shaping policies related to science and technology, giving them ownership of the innovations that will

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define our nation's future. We challenge our youth to harness science and technology to develop sustainable, inclusive industries that address national pressing issues such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty.

By integrating our efforts into the global innovation ecosystem, we position ourselves as active contributors to the worldwide progress while addressing our unique needs. Together, through strategic investment, collaboration, and youth empowerment, we can build a future where technology truly serves the people, fostering a more just and prosperous South Africa. Hon Chair, at the heart of transformation is the digital economy, which is becoming a significant driver of growth. The e-commerce sector in particular has seen a rapid increase in recent years. This isn't just about co-operation, it's about the e-commerce value chain creating jobs at every level, from logistics and digital marketing to customer service and content creation. It also provides a lifeline for small businesses, offering them a platform to reach a wider audience without the prohibitive cost of physical stores. By using digital tools, these businesses can make their products locally and internationally, level the playing field and foster entrepreneurship. It is highly important that we invest in digital infrastructure, such as the national broadband network and promote the roll-out of fibre to the home,

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FTTH, and public Wi-Fi networks in low-income and rural areas. This aims to provide alternative, more affordable data options and bridge the gap between the poor and the rich.

Infrastructure is only half the equation. We can't thrive in a digital world without a digitally skilled workforce. Artificial intelligence literacy programmes shouldn't be about creating artificial intelligence experts overnight, but rather about ensuring everyone understands what artificial intelligence is and how it can be used ethically and productively. By focusing on both our digital infrastructure and the skills of our people, we can ensure that South Africa doesn't just adapt to the Fourth Industrial Revolution but leads it. Let us work together to build a future that is inclusive, prosperous, and technologically advanced. I thank you, Chair.

Debate concluded.

The mini plenary session rose at 12:40.