



**REPLY BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA
TO THE DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS**

**CAPE TOWN CITY HALL
16 FEBRUARY 2023**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Masondo,
Deputy President David Mabuza,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Honourable Members,

In the State of the Nation Address last week, I said that a nation is defined by how its people meet the gravest of difficulties – “whether they work together and confront their challenges as one, united by a common purpose, or whether they surrender to the problems before them.”

The same can be said of their elected representatives.

Are we, as the elected representatives of our people gathered here in this House, able to work together to confront the challenges of our nation, united by a common purpose?

Or will we be consumed by our differences and, in so doing, surrender to the problems before us?

The debate on the State of the Nation Address over the last two days has done much to emphasise our differences and reveal the extent of political contestation in our society.

That is to be expected – even welcomed – in a vibrant and robust democracy like ours.

The debate has raised important issues and some constructive suggestions have been made.

But there are those in this House who, instead of being merchants of hope, have cast themselves as merchants of despair.

They have determined that their political fortunes are best served by depicting a country in chaos – instead of being parties that acknowledge the challenges and that are determined to work together to find solutions so that we leave no one behind.

Rather than present a balanced assessment of the state of the nation, they have resorted to dishonest and self-serving rhetoric.

Rather than acknowledge the grave damage caused to our country by state capture, by the effects of a devastating global pandemic or by the worst public violence in the history of our

democracy, some of these Honourable Members have failed to come up with practical suggestions or solutions that can resolve the many problems our nation faces.

Some choose to belittle and deride what has been achieved over the last five years in the midst of extremely difficult conditions because it does not serve their political interests to recognise the progress that is plainly clear.

These contributions may serve the electoral aspirations of some of the parties represented here, but they do not serve the interests of the people of South Africa.

The task we have, as elected representatives, is to emerge from this debate with a common determination to meet the challenges of the present and renew the promise contained in our Constitution of a better life for all.

Where people have begun to doubt the promise of our Constitution, it is our job to restore it.

Not through words, but through action.

To do so, we must reflect deeply and honestly on what has gone wrong, on where we have strayed from the path we set out on in the first place.

As the Honourable Buthelezi rightly said in his remarks, which were delivered by the Honourable Singh, what South Africans want is honesty, fairness, justice and to know that their government is capable and willing to do its job.

At the same time we must reflect on the progress we have made.

And we must concentrate on the actions that we need to take now to overcome the challenges that we face.

Nobody can deny the distance we have come over the past five years.

Nor can anyone deny that our country has been struck by successive crises that have severely impeded our efforts to improve the lives of our people.

We inherited a state hollowed out by corruption and malfeasance and an economy in steep decline.

Since then, we have rebuilt the capability and restored the independence of institutions that are essential to our democracy.

We have reinvigorated entities like the South African Revenue Service, the National Prosecuting Authority and the Special Investigating Unit to fulfil their mandates effectively and without fear or favour.

The tireless work of the State Capture Commission and the Investigating Directorate is now bearing fruit in the prosecution of those alleged to be responsible for state capture.

We faced up to the worst global pandemic in a century, and marshalled an unprecedented response to save lives and protect livelihoods.

We implemented a new social grant which has reached more than 11 million people. We supported over 5 million workers who would otherwise have lost their jobs, and provided tax relief and direct support to thousands of businesses.

Indeed, Honourable Masango, South Africans need hand-ups and not handouts.

That is why our unprecedented expansion of public employment programmes has proven to be a success and an effective tool for mitigating unemployment when not enough jobs are being created by the economy.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus has created work and livelihood opportunities for one million people to date, most of whom are young people.

We have implemented far-reaching economic reforms to restore confidence in our economy, opened the way for private investment in electricity generation for the first time, and released spectrum to harness the potential of the digital era.

We have successfully mobilised new investments in factories, production lines, call centres, farms, and mines across the country. These have created jobs and opportunities, including for small businesses.

This represents real progress to rebuild our country and to recover what we had lost.

Despite this progress, however, we face steep challenges.

South Africans are worn down by power outages, water supply interruptions, rising crime and instability in local government.

Several speakers in the debate raised the need for effective and urgent implementation of the tasks outlined in the State of the Nation Address to address these challenges decisively over the next year.

Foremost among these are the actions needed for the resolution of the electricity crisis.

As we said during our address last week, we do not need another plan.

We need to accelerate implementation of the plan that we have.

We have already taken a number of important steps to reduce the severity and frequency of load shedding.

The measures which the Minister of Finance will announce in next week's budget will boost the rollout of rooftop solar by businesses and households.

To end load shedding, however, we must shift gear.

A crisis of this nature demands a coordinated response and it demands urgent action.

That is the reason why I am appointing a special Minister in the Presidency and the reason why a national state of disaster has been declared.

As I said last week, this new Minister will assume full responsibility for overseeing all aspects of the electricity crisis response.

The Minister will be responsible for driving the various actions being coordinated by the National Energy Crisis Committee to end load shedding as a matter of urgency.

The reality is that the resolution of the energy crisis requires effective coordination across several departments and public entities.

It requires the undivided attention of a political principal who does not need to split their time and energies among different important responsibilities.

This appointment will ensure that there is a Minister who is ultimately responsible for resolving load shedding and who is able to work with all fellow Cabinet ministers, departments and entities to do so.

Some have suggested that the appointment of the Minister will cause confusion and fragmentation, and that it might also result in turf wars amongst the ministers who deal with energy and Eskom.

This is not the case. The Minister of Electricity will be focused day in and day out only on addressing the load shedding crisis, working together with the management of Eskom and the board. The Minister will be leading the National Energy Crisis Committee and interacting with all other departments in the spirit of cooperative governance.

The Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy deals with matters of energy policy as well as mineral resources. Beyond the energy crisis that we face, the restructuring of government will be effected to enable entities that fall under various departments to be properly located in those departments.

The Minister of Public Enterprises is executing the recommendations of Presidential Review Commission as well as the State Owned Enterprises Council in relation to the ownership and the governance of state owned enterprises. That function should be completed in time as we continue with the restructuring of government.

The Minister of Public Enterprises will therefore continue to work on the restructuring of Eskom as well as other state owned enterprises until then.

With the focus that the Minister of Electricity will have on load shedding and the work that is being done by Eskom and the board I do believe that we stand a much better chance to address this overriding challenge and crisis that our country faces.

As Minister Mantashe said, urgency of execution and delivery is paramount. We don't have the luxury of time.

Several speakers in this debate have argued that the national state of disaster is unnecessary, or that it will allow for abuse of the system.

This includes some leaders in the opposition – such as the Premier of the Western Cape – who as recently as last month were writing me letters and holding media briefings calling for a state of disaster to be declared.

The Honourable Brink yesterday called the Disaster Management Act “a dangerous weapon in the hands of incompetent ministers”.

This is the same Disaster Management Act that made possible our decisive, effective and agile response to successive waves of COVID infections.

It was this Act that empowered us during that pandemic to save many lives and prevent even greater hardship.

It is this Disaster Management Act that has on numerous occasions enabled us to provide urgent relief and support to people affected by floods and other natural disasters.

The state of disaster that was declared last week will be used to mitigate the social and economic effects of load shedding and accelerate the measures necessary to close the shortfall in electricity, and nothing else.

As I said in the State of the Nation Address, we will ensure that environmental protections and technical standards are maintained, and that procurement is undertaken with transparency and proper oversight.

We will use the state of disaster to get rid of unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles that stand in the way of urgently bringing new generation capacity onto the grid. We will use it to ensure continuity in the provision of critical services and supply chains, and to address the impact of load shedding on businesses and households.

As we build an electricity system that will meet our energy requirements into the future, we need to dispel some of the myths that have been circulating – and that have been repeated here – about the path we are taking.

We need to dispel this idea that we are abandoning coal as a fuel source. We should all remember that coal fired power stations provide 80% of our energy source and will therefore continue to provide the bulk of our 'base load' supply into the future.

We are committed to a future energy mix that consists of a diversity of energy sources, including coal, renewables, nuclear, gas, hydro, storage, bio-mass and other forms of energy.

We must dispel the idea that unbundling of Eskom into three separate state-owned entities is out of step with international trends.

The reality is that over 100 countries (including China, Germany and Russia) have established independent transmission and system operation companies.

We need to dispel the claim that creating a more competitive, efficient and sustainable electricity generation market threatens the ability of the state to provide affordable electricity to its citizens.

On the contrary, the reforms we are undertaking will improve the ability of the state to provide power to the people now and into the future.

Our priorities in 2023 are to decisively resolve the electricity crisis, reduce unemployment and root out corruption and crime.

Yet as we confront the most immediate and pressing challenges facing our country, we must also plant the seeds for future growth.

We must ask ourselves not only where we are as a country, but what kind of a country we want to be.

We need to undertake other essential work now so that we can build beyond the crisis and lay the foundation for a better future for all South Africans.

As a country with a young population, we have enormous potential for growth and development. The most effective way to harness that potential is through ensuring equal access to quality education.

In the State of the Nation Address, we outlined some of the work underway to improve access to quality early childhood development.

This is being supported by progress in basic education, where schools in poorer areas are showing improved performance thanks to greater government support. We are developing vocational education and training opportunities and implementing new ways to fund workplace training programmes so that we develop the skills that the economy needs.

And through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, we are creating opportunities for young people to more easily access opportunities for employment, training, entrepreneurship and work experience.

By the same measure, access to quality health care – and indeed better health itself – are necessary to improve people’s lives and build a successful society and a more productive economy.

We are committed to the provision of quality health care for all regardless of their ability to pay.

We will therefore progressively implement the National Health Insurance as soon as the necessary legislation is approved by Parliament.

In the meantime, we are preparing for its implementation through the national quality improvement plan and putting in place the necessary staff and funding.

We are improving the quality of care in our clinics through the Ideal Clinic programme. Using the capabilities of the electronic vaccination record system we developed for COVID-19, the Department of Health will introduce an Electronic Health Record solution to improve management of health records.

As our country and the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are strengthening the fight against the HIV pandemic that we have been engaged in for more than three decades. While we have made remarkable progress in fighting HIV, as well as TB, new infections are still occurring at unacceptable rates and we continue to record deaths that could have been prevented.

We are also working to combat non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cancer.

We are paying greater attention to mental health. According to the World Health Organisation, around one in five South Africans suffer from mental health disorders.

Our starting point must be to raise awareness and combat stigma around mental health, so that people are able to seek and receive mental health services. Beyond that, we need to dedicate more resources and qualified professionals to the provision of such services.

We are working to end discrimination against persons with disabilities and to remove the impediments to their full participation in the economy, society and all areas of life.

Last year, we held a summit on economic empowerment for persons with disabilities to improve access to resources such as land, finance capital, decent work, capital infrastructure and labour.

This year, we plan to continue this work by dealing with barriers to transport for persons with disabilities and ensuring that government institutions make reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the workplace.

The Honourable Holomisa has raised the issue of the pensions of civil servants and military veterans from the former TBVC states.

These are indeed issues that need to be considered. The Deputy President heads a task team on benefits for military veterans, which has a workstream on pensions. I have asked this task team to provide a report on this issue.

I have further asked the Minister of Finance to set up a team to look into the issue of pensions for civil servants from the TBVC states.

Building beyond the crisis means addressing the fundamental threat of climate change and strengthening our country's resilience to future disasters.

The ambitious carbon emission targets we have set are essential to the future well-being and prosperity of the South African people.

Unless we act now, alongside the other countries of the world, our country will experience ever more frequent and ever more severe weather conditions. More lives will be lost, more people will be displaced, living conditions will worsen.

Through the work of the Presidential Climate Commission, the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team led by Mr Daniel Mminele, government departments and stakeholders, we have developed a clear, just and inclusive path towards a low-carbon economy and society.

As we work to reduce emissions, we must undertake adaptation measures to counter the effects of climate change and design our cities, towns and rural areas to be more resilient in the face of adverse weather events.

We will be reviewing our disaster management architecture to make sure that it is adequately equipped to respond to floods and other natural disasters going forward.

Building beyond the crisis also means rebuilding our infrastructure.

Several speakers in the debate spoke about the poor state of much of our infrastructure. Investment in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure has been declining over many years.

Since taking office, we have taken important steps to reverse that trend. Through Infrastructure South Africa, we have focused on building the capacity within the state to design, prepare and implement infrastructure projects. Through the Infrastructure Fund, we have sought new approaches to funding infrastructure drawing on a diversity of sources.

We are also undertaking structural reforms in energy, water, ports and railways that will enable greater investment in these vital industries.

We have significantly increased the budget allocated to infrastructure across government and, as I indicated in SONA, significant road, water, housing and other projects are underway.

To succeed in all these efforts, we need to ensure that the state has the necessary resources, capacity and skills.

We are taking steps to professionalise the public service across all spheres, to ensure the right people are in the right positions, that they are held accountable, and that they are empowered to provide the best possible service to the people.

Further to this, I am directing that all infrastructure and service departments conduct skills audits within nine months.

These audits must not just tell us what training officials think they require, but must help us understand where critical skills do exist in these departments to effectively deliver infrastructure and services. The National School of Government will work with other organs of state like the Human Sciences Research Council to conduct these audits.

We said in the State of the Nation Address last week that South Africa's fortunes are inextricably linked to those of our continent.

We depend on a peaceful, stable and prosperous Africa to advance our own development.

In April last year, South Africa assumed its two-year term as a member of the AU Peace and Security Council. We will be chairing a meeting of the Council in Addis Ababa tomorrow.

Through our participation in the Peace and Security Council, South Africa is working with other countries to bring peace to areas of conflict on the continent such as the Eastern DRC, Libya, Sahel region and Northern Mozambique.

In October last year, South Africa hosted and played a role in the facilitation of the successful peace talks between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which were facilitated by the African Union.

We will continue to provide whatever assistance we can to the resolution of conflict and peace keeping on the continent.

Our recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of a united response to common challenges.

As the African Union Chair in 2020, South Africa led the continental response to the COVID-19 pandemic, overseeing a continent-wide strategy, setting up innovative online platforms to provide access for all countries to essential medical supplies, mobilising international funding and securing over 500 million COVID vaccines for the continent.

Now, as chair of the African Union COVID-19 Commission, we continue to lead the continent on health security as a means of preventing and responding to the pandemic and plan for future ones.

We are working as co-chair of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, together with the World Health Organisation and other organisations to develop a global platform that will enable the rapid development of, and equitable access to, the tools needed to respond to any future pandemics.

These are part of concerted efforts to ensure that Africa and the global community are adequately prepared for any future health emergencies.

While much of this work does not find its way into the headlines, the reality is that all these efforts are necessary for the development and transformation of our country.

While others make a lot of noise on the side lines, the reality is that this government is building the future, today.

Honourable Members,
Fellow South Africans,

The values contained in our Constitution are essential in shaping the South Africa we want.

The Constitution calls for a society based on human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

And it calls for accountability, responsiveness and openness in government.

These values provide a sense of purpose and direction for all of us, individuals, families and communities, and a shared vision of what is important and meaningful to us.

To live up to these values, to fulfil this bold vision in our Constitution, we must honour them in our own lives.

We must treat one another with respect, integrity, responsibility and compassion.

We must build a society in which people can work together for the common good, in which all people are treated with dignity, and in which everyone is given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

It is these values that have set our country apart since the dawn of democracy almost 30 years ago.

It is these values, too, which inform our relations with all peoples and nations across the world.

We have observed with great sorrow the immense loss of life and suffering caused by the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. We once again extend our deepest condolences to the governments and people of both Türkiye and Syria in the face of this humanitarian disaster.

As I conclude, I wish to extend my appreciation to Deputy President David Mabuza for his unwavering support over the last five years.

He has ably led the South African National AIDS Council and extensive engagements with military veterans and traditional leaders. He has supported peace building efforts in South Sudan and led processes around land reform, among other things.

Deputy President Mabuza has indicated his wish to step down from his position, a request that we are attending to.

I also wish to extend my thanks to all Ministers and Deputy Ministers, Premiers, Directors-General, Advisers and Presidency staff for their hard work and support.

Finally, allow me to reiterate what I said in the 2018 State of the Nation Address delivered exactly five years ago today.

“[W]e should reaffirm our belief that South Africa belongs to all who live in it. For though we are a diverse people, we are one nation.

“There are 57 million of us [now closer to 61 million] each with different histories, languages, cultures, experiences, views and interests. Yet we are bound together by a common destiny...

We are one people, committed to work together to find jobs for our youth; to build factories and roads, houses and clinics; to prepare our children for a world of change and progress; to build cities and towns where families may be safe, productive and content...

“While there are many issues on which we may differ, on these fundamental matters, we are at one.”

Honourable Members,

South Africans are a resilient people. They are a hopeful people.

And indeed there are reasons for hope.

But we cannot live on hope alone.

Dit is waar, Agbare du Toit, die Suid Afrikaanse mense verdien beter as onvervulde en leë beloftes.

It is the job of government to deliver basic services, to protect its citizens from harm, and to create the conditions in which every person can thrive.

That is why, as we work to implement the actions that will restore our country's promise, I am not asking for your patience.

I am asking for you to support our people as they work with us to address all these challenges.

Let us never forget that whatever our challenges, whatever our difference, we all seek the same future for our country.

Let us stand together to build that future.

I thank you.