



**REPLY BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA TO
THE DEBATE ON THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT ADDRESS**

**PARLIAMENT, CAPE TOWN
22 JULY 2024**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Thoko Didiza,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane,
Deputy President Paul Mashatile,
Honourable Members of Parliament,

I would like to begin by thanking the Honourable Members of this house for a robust and enriching debate.

The speeches delivered the whole day on Friday clearly demonstrate that there is a common appreciation among the Members of this august Parliament that a debate of this nature, and indeed the work of this Parliament, is about something far bigger, far more important than politics.

It is about the future of our country and its people. It is about a future of opportunity and promise that the people of South Africa have mandated us through their votes on the 29th of May to advance.

The nation's eyes are on this Parliament and all of us they elected to represent them.

We wholeheartedly endorse the call by the Honourable Moeimang when he said that this Parliament should become the epicentre of the advancement of the will of the people.

Much of what has been said during this debate has confirmed that we have entered a new era in South African politics. It is an era of hope and optimism for the people of our country.

We must demonstrate in word and deed that this is an era of a government of national unity and not a fleeting convenience.

We have had, and will continue to have, points of divergence, as the spirited nature of the debate has demonstrated.

At the same time we all understand what is expected of us by those who put us here.

They expect us to chart this country towards the ultimate goal of a better life for all. Talking to each other and working together. Pulling in the same direction.

That direction is towards the implementation of the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029, the programme that will guide the seventh administration.

This plan will be based on the three strategic priorities that I outlined in the Opening of Parliament Address last week.

As we said, our priorities are inclusive growth and job creation, reducing poverty and tackling the high cost of living, and building a capable, ethical and developmental state.

For much of the sixth administration, we worked to address the challenges that impeded our growth, such as state capture, lack of reforms, Covid-19 and others.

We also worked to overcome the silo mentality that pervaded the work of government, and which in the past had contributed to inefficiency, duplication and wastage of resources.

As the Honourable Kwanka has rightly put it, it is important that whatever policies and programmes the Government of National Unity develops, they must be aligned to the social realities facing our people.

What will define the seventh administration is strategic alignment of priorities, greater efficiencies, focus and the optimal use of resources.

On Thursday evening, I said that the programme of government is grounded in the National Development Plan (NDP), the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

It is important to examine the progress we have made as a nation in addressing the challenges our people face. Last year, South Africa submitted its third country report to the UN on our progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

It highlighted important trends towards meeting SDG targets in eradicating poverty and hunger, in good health and well-being, in inclusive and equitable quality education, in the provision of clean water and sanitation, in climate action, in building strong institutions for peace and justice, and others.

Government's 30 Year Review Report and the results of Census 2022 are testament to the considerable progress the democratic state has made in pursuing equitable and sustainable development.

On eradicating poverty and hunger, more indigent South Africans are accessing grants as part of an extensive social security net to mitigate the worst effects of poverty.

As I said in the Opening of Parliament Address, in focusing on reducing the cost of living, local government must strengthen its implementation of the indigent policy so that the old, the infirm and the poor are able to get assistance with the payment of basic services.

Sixty percent of our national budget is spent on the social wage and programmes vital to reducing poverty and supporting the poor.

When the worst global health emergency in modern times struck in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to shelter society's most vulnerable through the provision of special COVID grants, a scheme to support workers' wages, and support to businesses affected by the lockdowns.

Over the next five years we will be putting further programmes in place to reduce poverty and mitigate the effects of the high cost of living, especially on the poorest of the poor.

On good health and well-being, our country report to the UN notes reductions in maternal, infant and neonatal mortality. South Africans are living longer and have better health outcomes.

A key task for government over the next five years will be to ensure that everyone in South Africa has equal access to affordable quality health care through the implementation of the National Health Insurance.

We are unwavering in our commitment to implement universal health coverage in a manner that brings all South Africans on board. We will continue with dialogues, with exchanges, with interactions to make this an important programme for our people.

On inclusive and equitable quality education, we have made progress with respect to functional literacy and numeracy at primary school level and in primary school completion rates.

Today more South African children have access to Early Childhood Development and Grade R, and secondary school education outcomes continue to steadily improve.

The child support grant, no-fee schools and expanded NSFAS funding have had a considerable impact on the lives of learners, particularly those from poor families.

These social protection interventions, alongside others like the Schools Nutrition Programme and the Sanitary Dignity Programme aimed at female learners, are helping to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

They are enabling more children to complete their schooling and to access opportunities after they finish school.

One need only look at last year's matriculation exam results, where learners who were social grant beneficiaries achieved an 81 percent pass rate.

Access to education expands the capabilities of young people but it also improves the productive capacity of our economy.

As the Honourable Maimane has rightly put it, our young people are competing with the world. This is a new world, one that is rapidly changing and being influenced by technological advances.

A better educated, better skilled workforce makes our economy more competitive and catalyses growth.

We welcome the call for greater investment in skilling young people for the economy of the future and for young people to be familiar with emerging technologies.

Science and technology is going to continue playing an important role in enabling our young people to play a key role in our economy.

Across all of these interventions, we are prioritising the health and well-being of children.

But we need to sustain the advances we have made over the last 30 years by improving maternal and child health care, tackling malnutrition and stunting, improving early childhood education, and ensuring universal access to clean water and sanitation.

With respect to the Sustainable Development Goal on the provision of basic services, 84 percent of South African households now have access to piped water, 71 percent have access to decent sanitation and 94 percent of households have access to electricity.

This seventh administration will focus on extending these services to those people who still do not have these basic requirements, and improving the reliability and affordability of delivery

This will require measures to improve the efficiency of local government to deliver on its crucial mandate.

Minister Hlabisa's determination that all municipalities receive the necessary administrative, technical and financial support for them to be viable and stable represents the seventh administration's clear intention to improve the functioning of municipalities.

We agree with Councillor Stofile that we must address with urgency the governance and oversight challenges at local government level and the serious problem of municipal and consumer debt.

On building and strengthening institutions, we have made significant progress in deepening democracy during 30 years of freedom through safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As parties to the Government of National Unity, we are in agreement on the importance of entrenching our constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

We will continue to exert our every effort to safeguard the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media and the work of the institutions supporting democracy.

We continue to entrench gender equality across all facets of society, and in promoting the full participation in society of persons with disabilities.

We have enacted into law the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Council, which will oversee and coordinate GBV programmes across government and in partnership with all stakeholders.

An important focus of this work will be women's economic empowerment, and on leveraging government's policy of setting aside 40 percent of public procurement for women-owned businesses.

South Africa is a beacon of hope and progress when it comes to the rights of the LGBTQI+ community.

These are all important aspects of our human rights culture.

I cite this progress we have made together in advancing towards the Sustainable Development Goals not as a diversion from the realities and challenges of the day.

We are very much alive to the challenges we still face as a country.

And yet we must remind ourselves that South Africa is not in the hopeless situation that some in the opposition benches want us to believe, and have sought to loudly assert with sound and fury during this debate.

South Africa is a country that has come a long way over the past 30 years. Let us never lose sight of that.

Certainly, there have been setbacks and shortcomings. But we have done much to recover from these and are now committed to move forward with greater speed and impact.

We have taken to heart the words of the Honourable Zibi that "urgency is the currency of the times in which we now live".

Our Government of National Unity is therefore determined to rapidly scale up the pace of our efforts to bring development and shared prosperity to our people by working together.

And in this effort, as Minister Steenhuisen says, we need the builders, not the breakers. We need weavers and not vultures.

Those who share this vision of a better South Africa will find the doors of the Government of National Unity always open to cooperation and collaboration.

It is expected of all who have been entrusted with positions of leadership within the Government of National Unity that we rise to the challenge to be builders and not breakers.

We must be at the forefront of building a capable, ethical developmental state, of growing an inclusive economy, and reducing poverty.

As the members of the Government of National Unity, we have agreed to a common minimum programme that forms the basis of the work of this administration.

We agree with Minister De Lille that the needs and pain of our people know no political affiliation.

The policies we pursue and the programmes we implement are not the property of one or another political party. We will therefore, each of us, equally advance and promote the positions and decisions of the Government of National Unity.

I have said to my colleagues in the Executive that there should be no competition among parties to the Government of National Unity to outdo each other or lay claim to the policies that we collectively adopt.

When we speak of transforming our country, we cannot confine our actions to building roads, factories and houses.

We cannot bring about a better South Africa if we do not give attention to the moral fibre of our society.

Crime, corruption, substance abuse and all manner of ills continue to fray our social fabric and hold back development.

Across our nation, the disintegration of the family has become a common feature.

Some 60 percent of South African children don't live with their biological fathers, and women are often left to raise their children with no financial support from their fathers.

The abuse of women and children, abuse of the elderly and discrimination against persons living with disabilities are a stain on our moral conscience.

As we strengthen the capabilities of our law enforcement agencies to deal decisively with crimes against society's most vulnerable, we must intensify the work needed to prevent such crimes in the first place.

Prevention begins in our homes, in our communities, in our places of learning, in our religious institutions, and importantly, in the media.

We have strayed from being a society that both cherishes and advances equal opportunity.

The values of hard work, study, perseverance, steady progression and entrepreneurship have been replaced by a get rich quick mindset.

The corrosive lure of corruption has played no small part in this.

As a Government of National Unity and in the upcoming National Dialogue, we must come up with the measures we need to take to promote greater respect for human dignity, ubuntu and empathy in our society.

This should involve our faith-based institutions, civil society organisations working in communities, trade unions, sporting organisations, youth formations and others.

Restoring the values of integrity, honesty and empathy in our society is not something that a strategic framework of government planning can resolve.

It is an all of society effort which we must all be part of.

Leadership must come from all of us.

Just as we have a responsibility to stand firmly against racism, sexism, homophobia, ethnic chauvinism, tribalism and discrimination, as leaders we must demonstrate to the South African people that we are here to work for them, and not for ourselves.

We must demonstrate that we are servants of the people.

In 1994 we achieved a democratic breakthrough that many believed impossible, and took those important first steps towards reconciliation between the races.

As this Parliament, we must hold firm to the principles that underpin the founding values of our democratic country.

We must not allow our work to be derailed by sowers of disunity.

The name-calling, race-baiting and ethnic chauvinism we have seen in the course of this debate has been regrettable.

Minister McKenzie has challenged us, as a government and as a society, to address the national question.

This is vital if we are to proceed to build a united nation. Not only do we need to have frank and honest conversations about how race continues to define the prospects of our people, but we need to pursue policies that resolve these contradictions in our economy and society.

The Honourable Sangoni Diko was clear in saying non-racialism is fundamental to the struggle for a free and equal society.

Non-racialism is not a concession. It is not an act of charity.

It is something that we must continue to build so that we can achieve a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it.

The task of building a non-racial and a non-sexist society requires that we remove the material barriers that apartheid created to divide South Africans.

That is why we have placed the task of inclusive growth and job creation at the centre of the work of this administration.

That is why we have stressed the relationship between growth and transformation.

To undertake the necessary redistribution of wealth and opportunity, we need an economy that grows and thrives.

And to achieve growth, we need to mobilise the capabilities, resources and efforts of all South Africa's people.

In South Africa, growth and transformation are two sides of the same coin. We cannot achieve one without the other.

We should therefore not dismiss the vital importance of promoting investment and supporting thriving businesses.

We must not avoid the measures we must necessarily take to ensure that the benefits of economic growth accrue to all South Africans.

We should not allow ourselves to be led into a false choice between policies that are supposedly 'pro-business' or 'pro-worker'.

We stand for inclusive growth that creates employment and that enables businesses to emerge, to grow and to achieve sustainable returns.

We agree with Deputy Minister Hendricks that the private sector needs to take on the responsibility of opening opportunities for unemployed South Africans, and we have insisted that employment creation must be one of the pillars of our partnership with business.

We have seen the impact of the Youth Employment Service, which was established together with private sector partners, and which has created over 150,000 opportunities for young people to get work experience in South African companies.

We appreciate the value and the necessity of public programmes that create work and livelihood opportunities.

Minister Mantashe is right that if we are to meaningfully address the unemployment crisis, we will have to focus on the lower end of the labour market where mass employment is required.

The Honourable Shivambu says we are living in an alternative reality when it comes to job creation.

For a taste of reality, he could visit some of the 23,000 schools across this country where more than a million school assistants have made a tangible difference in improving learning outcomes, supporting curriculum delivery and improving the classroom environment.

Unlike some in this House, we see the economic and social value of the work and livelihood support that has been made possible by mass public employment programmes.

We see the impact of the 188,000 agricultural input vouchers have been issued to small-scale farmers to expand their production and support food security.

As Minister Nyhontso says, we need to act with more resolve, more resources and more emphasis to correct the historic injustice of land dispossession and provide people with access to land and the means to work it.

We see the vital importance of the initiatives described by Premier Lesufi to provide finance, skills, technology and infrastructure to grow township economies and create jobs.

Honourable Members,

Thirty years ago, at the Summit of the Organisation for African Unity, the forerunner of the African Union, our nation's founding father Nelson Mandela said:

"Africa shed her blood and surrendered the lives of her children so that all her children could be free.

"A million times, she put her hand to the plough that has now dug up the encrusted burden of oppression accumulated for centuries."

As this administration, we remain committed to a foreign relations policy and outlook that prioritises the achievement of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Honourable Malema, South Africa's role on the continent and across the world remains firmly on our agenda.

We see the African Continental Free Trade Area and other instruments of continental economic integration as vital to our own economic fortunes.

In January this year, we saw our first shipment of products to other African countries under the AfCFTA. We are extremely encouraged by the potential the AfCFTA presents in terms of new markets for South African goods, products and services.

We welcome the progress being made towards finalising rules of origin, and towards a Pan-African payment and settlement system.

As Minister Tau said, the AfCFTA, is a game-changing initiative to leverage one of the fastest-growing consumer markets in the world, a growing market that is young, tech-savvy, highly educated and conscientious about implementing actionable Pan-Africanism for the twenty-first century.

As South Africa, we are committed to Silencing the Guns on the continent and to playing our part in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in Africa.

We have deployed members of the South African National Defence Force to support UN, AU and SADC peacekeeping missions in several parts of the continent.

They have served not only their country, but also their continent, with diligence and courage.

We once again pay tribute to the soldiers who have lost their lives during operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of our soldiers and we salute their bravery and sacrifice in the cause of peace in one of the world's most troubled regions.

We will continue to make every effort to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our troops on all peacekeeping missions.

Our principled solidarity with peoples burdened under the yoke of oppression will not waver.

We stand in solidarity with the peoples of Western Sahara and Palestine who are still being denied their right to self-determination.

On Friday last week, as members of this House were debating, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion on the State of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian land and the construction of settlements in the West Bank, ruling that this was illegal under international law.

The court said this should come to an end as rapidly as possible.

This is a separate case to the one launched by South Africa at the International Court of Justice last year in response to the genocide being perpetrated against the people of Gaza.

What this latest ruling indicates is that international momentum against Israel's continued violations of the rights of the Palestinian people is growing.

Just as our own struggle for national liberation was eventually won with steady victories, so too will the quest for Palestinian statehood be ultimately realised.

We will continue to pursue progressive internationalism and advance principled solidarity. Our own history and experience demands no less of us.

On global platforms we will continue to push for reform of the institutions of global governance, including the UN Security Council, and for them to better reflect and give a greater voice to developing countries.

We will continue to push for the international financial institutions and the multilateral development banks to be reformed and to provide greater financial and technical support to developing countries to meet their most pressing needs.

South Africa is preparing to host the annual G20 Summit in 2025.

We are pleased that our campaign to include the African Union as a member of the G20 was successful.

This is an important platform to advance the interests of Africa and other countries of the Global South, and to mobilise support for a more just and equal world order.

Last year, South Africa played an instrumental role in the expansion of the BRICS bloc of countries. This presents favourable trade and investment opportunities for our country, which we will continue to pursue in the course of the seventh administration.

We will continue to urge developed economies to meet their responsibilities and obligations to developing economies to provide support for climate change adaptation and mitigation, in line with their commitments under the Paris Agreement.

As the Government of National Unity, we will continuously pursue a foreign policy based on the national interest, our country's economic objectives, and in furtherance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

In the same speech at the meeting of the OAU in 1994, Madiba concluded thus:

"If freedom was the crown which the fighters of liberation sought to place on the head of mother Africa, let the upliftment, the happiness, prosperity and comfort of her children be the jewel of the crown."

We are now a Government of National Unity, formed in the cause of rebuilding our nation.

We are committed to putting our differences aside and working together for the common good.

Behind us are 62 million South Africans who want and need us to succeed.

As Minister Groenewald has said, we have before us an opportunity to restore and build. So let us use this opportunity.

In challenging and difficult times, this unity will be our comfort, our courage and our greatest strength.

It is time to get South Africa working again.

I thank you.