



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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

**PARLIAMENT, CAPE TOWN**

**20 FEBRUARY 2020**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thandi Modise,  
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Masondo,  
Deputy President David Mabuza,  
Honourable Members,

Over the course of the last week since the State of the Nation Address was tabled here in Parliament, Members of Parliament and the people of South Africa have participated in a vigorous debate on the state of our nation.

It has taken place here in the House, on radio, in newspapers, on social media, in homes, in taxis, in taverns over these days.

The debate has demonstrated the diversity of views and experiences in our country.

It has, at times, also demonstrated the divisions that still exist across our land and in our body politic.

Yet, no matter how strongly we may differ, no matter how fiercely we may debate, we remain united in our desire for a better future for all.

On this occasion, as we reflect on the debate that has taken place, it is worth recalling the words that we together chose to form the Preamble of our Constitution.

In that Preamble, we said the following:

*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.*

*We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this  
Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to —*

*Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic  
values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*

*Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is  
based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;*

*Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;  
and*

*Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a  
sovereign state in the family of nations.*

It is important to recall this Preamble in its entirety not only because it correctly and clearly characterises our past, but, just as importantly, it describes the kind of society that we seek to build.

It is what unites us and what must guide and inspire us as we grapple with the challenges of the inheritance of our past, as we try to make sense of our present and determine our future

Apartheid was inherently a crime against humanity.

It was a crime against the oppressed people of South Africa even before it was so declared by the United Nations in 1973.

It was so immoral in its conception and so devastating in its execution that there is no South African living today who is not touched by its legacy.

Our responsibility – as the public representatives gathered in this House, as public servants, as leaders, as citizens – is to be resolutely committed to build a society that stands as the antithesis of the inhumanity of our past.

It is our responsibility to build a genuinely non-racial society in which all South Africans have an equal claim to rights, to citizenship and to the wealth of the land.

For us, non-racialism is not the product of our negotiated transition.

It is a fundamental and immutable principle that defines the character of our democratic nation.

Madam Speaker,

I am grateful to those Honourable Members who participated in this debate, most of whom engaged meaningfully and constructively with the issues covered in the State of the Nation Address.

Notwithstanding our differences there were a good number of members of this House who were able to find some issues which they thought were steps in the right direction.

Through their contributions, these Members have demonstrated, across party lines, that this is indeed a Parliament of the People, firmly committed to representing the interests and needs of all our people.

However, we cannot reflect on this debate without acknowledging the shameful exchanges that took place in this House on the first day of the debate – exchanges which served to politicise and trivialise the national crisis of gender-based violence.

At a time when we are called upon as nation to intensify and deepen the struggle to end all forms of violence perpetrated by men against women, the statements made – and the purposes they were intended to serve – were disgraceful.

They undermine the resolve that this House demonstrated in its Joint Sitting in September last year to respond to this crisis decisively and swiftly.

I would like to read a text message received from a concerned South African whose message succinctly addresses what happened in the House regarding this matter:

*“Dear President. I text you with a very heavy heart. I am most saddened as a woman. The use of Gender Based Violence (GBV) as grist for the gossip-mill in your Parliament is one that has weighed heavily on me. The weaponization of GBV is an insult to the millions of women who are victims of this national crisis.*

*“I dream of a nation where our leaders use the platform to speak about solutions on GBV, Gender Inequality and Femicide as opposed to using it to settle political scores. This social crisis is a reality for many women, not just in our country but all over the globe.*

*“The mention of a person who has passed away in Parliament yesterday evening was unjust, unnecessary and very spine chilling. It was raw and inconsiderate. I am deeply saddened by the manner in which the events unfolded.”*

I think this sums up the feelings of many people who were witness to what happened in Parliament two days ago.

We owe the people of South Africa an apology for what happened in this debate.

Let us agree that we should never again allow such an important issue to be used in this way and reaffirm our shared and unwavering commitment to use all means at our disposal to end gender-based violence and femicide.

Since I announced the Emergency Response Action Plan last year, working together with civil society, we have made important progress.

We have improved access to justice for victims and survivors.

The SAPS has confirmed that all police stations have sexual assault evidence collection kits.

They have prioritised backlog cases related to gender-based violence and established the Cold Case Task Team.

They have analysed over 3,600 dockets on sexual offences, and more than 60% of these have been reopened for further investigation and referred to the Senior Public Prosecutor for decision.

The departments of Justice and Correctional Services have vetted more than 11,300 government personnel working directly with children and mentally disabled persons since the Emergency Response Action Plan was implemented.

We are making progress in establishing a visible and sustained multimedia campaign to raise awareness around gender-based violence and change behaviour.

We have appointed 200 social workers and are training health professionals and social service practitioners on post-violence care and trauma debriefing.

The NPA has identified areas where more Thuthuzela Centres will be established, including Cradock, Kwa-Vuma, Ga-Rankuwa, Paarl and Tzaneen.

We are making progress on the economic inclusion of women, through programmes like the SheTrades initiative, the efforts of various departments to ensure that 40% of

procurement goes to women, and the prioritisation of women as beneficiaries of land reform programmes.

Despite this progress, there is still much more to be done.

As a nation, let us have the courage and the commitment to bring an end to the violence perpetrated by men against women and children.

Madam Speaker,  
Honourable Members,

The State of the Nation is about the immediate and pressing task of the inclusive growth we want to achieve for our people.

At its most basic and essential, inclusive growth is about changing people's lives for the better.

While we can use economic jargon and track metrics like GDP growth, debt ratios and levels of gross fixed investment, the most important measure of our progress is the impact that these efforts are having on the lives of South Africans, especially the poor.

The substantial infrastructure investment that we announced last week will be a catalyst for economic activity and will make our economy more competitive.

But it will also make a direct and immediate contribution to lowering the cost of living and improving the quality of life for millions.

The infrastructure build programme makes public transport safer and more reliable.

It makes the school environment more conducive for learning.

It improves the quality of health care, makes broadband more accessible and affordable, makes rivers safer for schoolchildren to cross, provides decent living quarters for students and makes it easier for small-scale farmers to access markets.

Earlier this week, we met with representatives of several finance institutions – both domestic and international – who were enthusiastic about the potential for infrastructure development in South Africa.

They are committed not only to work with us to develop blended financing options, but also to mobilise the skills we need to prepare and execute infrastructure projects.

I agree with Honourable Members who say that we need to be more innovative in our approach to infrastructure through, for example, build, operate and transfer schemes – where we mobilise private capital to meet a public need.

As we work towards collaborative solutions to our country's socio-economic challenges, we are encouraged by the development of the impact investment industry.

The coalition Impact Investing South Africa defines impact investing as “a strategy or tool where risk, return and impact are optimised in order to finance businesses that address the Sustainable Development Goals.”

We wish strength and success to Impact Investing South Africa and its partners as they work towards organising the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment Summit to be held in South Africa this September.

We also welcome work underway by the pension fund industry for the development of new investment vehicles that will channel assets under management towards socio-economic development.

Our focus on infrastructure extends beyond our borders.

During the course of our chairship of the African Union, we will prioritise the development of the infrastructure that is vital to economic integration, building the roads, rail lines, ports and telecommunications networks that will link African markets to each other.

The employment that will be created through the investments that are being made in advanced manufacturing, agro-processing, infrastructure, mining, services, tourism, hospitality and other sectors will begin to lift families out of poverty.

It will give young people an opportunity to put their skills, capabilities and resourcefulness to productive use and to earn the income that will transform their lives.

Our deliberate programme to provide substantial additional support and opportunities to small businesses contributes to black economic empowerment by directing resources to people who have not been able to participate in the economy.

Growth improves revenue collection, reducing the deficit and government's reliance on borrowing.

This benefits the poor as more resources are available for investment in infrastructure, education, health care, small business support and other areas.

It will enable us, among other things, to increase our investment in early childhood development, which, as we speak, reaches well over 1.2 million children.

Inclusive growth depends on a capable state staffed and managed by people who are fit for purpose.

Over the course of the last two years, we have appointed qualified and capable people to lead several strategic public institutions and state owned enterprises.

We are firmly committed to only appoint people with the requisite skills, knowledge and experience – and to hold them accountable for their performance.



Strengthening local government is an important part of building a capable state that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of ordinary citizens.

I welcome the broad support for the District Development Model as an intervention to improve the pace, quality and reach of service provision.

The Hon Shaik Emam invited me to come with him to see instances of service delivery failure and the appalling conditions under which some communities live.

I invite the Hon Shaik Emam to accompany us when we begin implementing the District Development Model in these areas.

We must ensure that our visits to areas beset by service delivery challenges go hand in hand with developing plans to address these challenges.

Our role is not merely to observe, but to mobilise all the capacity of the state, of business and communities to fix people's problems.

Under the District Development Model all three spheres of government will coordinate and integrate their service delivery plans and budgets.

Communities and businesses will be able to guide developments taking place in their areas.

Next week, we will be having a meeting of the President's Coordinating Council, where all provinces and our 44 districts and 8 metros will meet to discuss the District Development Model and begin the process of evolving one plan for one country.

Through such collaboration, we will consolidate our approach to government as an interdependent and interrelated system.

We continue our efforts to change the spatial architecture of our past, promoting development in areas that have long been neglected.

The development of a new city around Lanseria should provide a model for building new cities elsewhere in the country, in high growth areas such as Lephalale or in areas with great potential like the Northern Cape.

We continue to rebuild the critical institutions that were eroded by state capture.

We have allocated substantial additional resources to the National Prosecuting Authority to fill critical vacancies and allow for the capacitation of a depleted prosecution service, enabling the NPA to advertise over 800 posts towards the end of last year.

The NPA is a critical component of the criminal justice system that needs to have the means to contribute effectively to the fight against crime.

To tackle serious corruption related to the capture of our state institutions, the NPA's new Investigating Directorate has been working closely with law enforcement, SARS, the Financial Intelligence Centre, the SIU, the Reserve Bank and the private sector, and has been engaging with the Zondo Commission.

We have established the SIU Tribunal to fastrack the settlement of civil claims – and the recovery of stolen funds – arising from SIU investigations.

And while Eskom and Transnet have between them recovered more than R2.3 billion in monies lost to corruption, we know that this is just a fraction of what has been lost to state capture.

We are determined that all these funds must be found and must be returned, no matter where in the world we need to go to find them.

We are determined that all those who have stolen from the people – and all those who continue to steal from the people – should face the full might of the law.

A prosperous nation depends on all citizens having access to quality health care.

The NHI is a vital and necessary step towards that goal.

It is about ensuring that the funds we spend annually on comprehensive health care results in better levels of care, in standardised services and in better health for all.

It is about ensuring that our parents and grandparents, our children and ourselves receive proper treatment in well-run facilities run by professionals regardless of where we live, and of how much or how little we have.

For every South African to receive an equal standard of quality health care is good for social cohesion, for all of us, and, ultimately, with a healthier population, good for our economy.

We are clear that the pace and the scale at which we implement the NHI will be determined by the means at our disposal.

As we improve the quality of our public health system, as we work to improve access, we must apply ourselves with even greater effort to bring an end to AIDS as a public health threat in our country.

We are within reach of the goal of 90-90-90, where at least 90% of HIV-positive people know their status, 90% of these people are on treatment, and 90% of those on treatment have undetectable viral loads.

The South African National AIDS Council, under the leadership of the Deputy President, is driving the broad strategic plan to achieve these goals and to turn the tide against TB.

This includes targeted prevention efforts aimed at vulnerable populations including adolescent girls and young women.

In further strengthening our response, we call on public representatives to promote awareness and step up prevention efforts on both HIV and TB.

Similarly, public representatives are urged to work with government and its social partners on the impact of non-communicable diseases on society and the economy.

As some Honourable Members have noted, land reform is an essential part of inclusive growth.

Unless we change the patterns of land ownership in this country – unless we give all South Africans access to land for agriculture, for commerce, for housing – we will not only be perpetuating a grave injustice, but we will also be constraining the economic potential of our land and our people.

The lack of land is – alongside the lack of skills – one of the greatest impediments to growth and prosperity.

It is for this reason that we are undertaking a programme of accelerated land reform that focuses not only on redistribution, restitution and tenure reform, but also on the support that beneficiaries need – in the form of training, finance, extension services and implements – to be successful farmers.

We support the amendment of section 25 of the Constitution and are drafting a new Expropriation Bill to clarify the circumstances in which land may be expropriated without compensation.

This is just one of the mechanisms available to government to effect redistribution.

Far from undermining property rights, these changes will broaden the property rights of all South Africans.

Honourable Members,

The measures we announced in SONA establish a platform for sustained and inclusive growth.

It is ludicrous to suggest, as some Members have, that these measures are intended to serve the interests of just one party.

They are measures that extend the benefits of economic and social development to all South Africans, particularly the poor and the vulnerable.

Over the course of the last 25 years, we have extended access for all South Africans – regardless of political affiliation – to housing, to electricity, to water, to education, to health care and to numerous other opportunities.

We are firmly committed to the path of economic reform that we have embarked on.

We are removing red tape to reposition our economy, working with the private sector and with labour to address the specific blockages that hamper the growth of companies.

We refuse to be reckless.

We will not, as some Honourable Members have suggested, simply switch off Eskom's life support, for to do so would be to plunge our economy and our country into chaos.

We have a clear roadmap to restore Eskom's financial and operational position and to place our entire energy sector on a new trajectory of sustainability.

As we address the immediate challenges and undertake the urgent tasks of the present, we are taking bold steps to stand the country in good stead for the future.

Our decision to establish a sovereign wealth fund even at a time of great economic difficulty is an exercise of our responsibility to future generations.

Madam Speaker,

Listening to some of the speakers in this debate one could be forgiven for thinking that South Africa was trapped in an inevitable downward spiral.

Despite the grave challenges we face, we are making progress.

We are not hiding from our problems.

We are acknowledging them, we are confronting them and, in so doing, we are establishing a firm foundation for growth.

I was impressed by an article written recently by Mark Ashton, a former financial journalist.

Among other things, he said:

*“Much like we need to fight back against corruption, fake news and other societal ills, we need to fight back against pessimists talking down the South African economy. Every time it raises its head, we need to respond.”*

Citing several success stories, he said:

*“These are not the stories that make it onto your Facebook or Twitter timelines because sharing good news is not algorithm friendly. If you need a daily reminder that your life sucks, write it on a Post-It and stick it on your mirror.*

*We have to push back against negativity at every turn. We have to show that the inches are all around us and we’re actively seeking them out.*

*It’s not the responsibility of government/ business /labour /media – it’s our personal responsibility.*

*We can. We will. End of story.”*

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

We have the means to build a better South Africa.

We have the resources, we have the capabilities, we have the people.

We have the will and we have the determination.

Yet we will not succeed unless we work together.

It is our shared responsibility to harness the boundless potential in our country to build a firm and durable social compact for inclusive growth and transformation.

But to do so means that we need to rebuild the bonds of trust between us.

It means we need to confront the suspicion, hostility and misunderstanding that is so prevalent across our society.

We need to rebuild trust and respect for each other within this Parliament.

We need to strengthen the ties between the people of this country and those of us elected to serve them.

We need to rebuild trust between employer and employee, between man and woman, between parent and child.

It is only by affirming each other, by recognising each other's essential integrity and humanity, that we will be able to restore the covenant of which President Nelson Mandela spoke 25 years ago – the covenant on which our free, united and democratic nation is founded.

Honourable Members,

The debate on the State of the Nation Address has drawn to a close.

Now is the time to implement.

As Martin Luther King Jr said:

*“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today.*

*We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.*

*In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.*

*This is no time for apathy or complacency.*

*This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”*

I thank you.