



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

13 FEBRUARY 2025

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

I wish to thank the Honourable Members for their contributions to the debate on the State of the Nation Address.

I welcome in particular those contributions that sought to enrich our common understanding of the work that we need to do to drive more rapid and inclusive growth, to create employment and to end poverty.

Some speakers held firm to the denialism and distortions demanded by their party positions.

This debate illustrated the dangers of retreating to corners, isolating ourselves in ideological, cultural, racial and linguistic enclaves and hardly ever engaging beyond our immediate circles.

This is not conducive to nation-building in a situation like ours, where diverse people live side-by-side.

This is what makes the forthcoming National Dialogue so important.

South Africans, informed by their different lived experiences, can discuss the many challenges facing our nation and develop common solutions.

As South Africans, we have sat around the negotiating table and forged agreements under much more trying and fraught circumstances.

The journey we are embarking upon now through the National Dialogue will result in concrete processes to become a more united and stronger South Africa in the face of many political, social and economic challenges, both globally and locally.

The debate saw the expression of divergent views on various matters by parties that make up the Government of National Unity. Sometimes these views were harshly expressed.

It is to be expected that the 10 political parties that make up the GNU, with their very different political and ideological perspectives, will not always agree and will sometimes feel the need on platforms such as this to talk to their different constituencies.

Despite these differences, these political parties are working well together in the Government of National Unity. We are finding ways of mediating our differences and remain focused on the actions that we are all committed to undertake.

It is this that gives me confidence that the Government of National Unity will continue to promote stability and serve the people of South Africa, in accordance with our Statement of Intent and the Medium Term Development Plan.

It is encouraging that a great many of the contributions in the debate appreciated the progress we have made as a country over the last 30 years.

This progress is owned by the people of South Africa, not by any individual or grouping.

This South Africa has been built by its own people who have sought to change their lives. They have entrusted the stewardship of this process to all of us and not just to some of us.

Many of the speakers in the debate acknowledged the real challenges we face today and recognised the work that is underway to address these challenges.

They said that the nation we want to build must be fundamentally different from the country that we once were.

Even those who may well have been opposed to the foundational document of our Constitution, the Freedom Charter, now embrace its tenets.

That shows the growing political maturity in our country; that we are embracing the change that our forebearers dreamed of 70 years ago.

We are the first to acknowledge that we have not yet achieved a number of the aspirations set out in the Freedom Charter, but it is dishonest to say that no significant progress has been made

Honourable Members,

A number of the speakers during this debate spoke about the land question, which I have in the past said was the original sin that was committed against the people of our country.

Describing the Natives Land Act of 1913, Solomon T Plaatje described the Natives Land Act of 1913 as an insidious law that rendered black South Africans pariahs in the land of their birth.

It is this Natives Land Act that plunged millions of people into poverty and deprivation, whose impact endures to this day.

Despite the terrible deed that was perpetrated against black South Africans, here in the City of Cape Town, along the foothills of Table Mountain, lies a potent symbol of hope, change and progress.

Just a few kilometres up the hill from our Parliament is District Six.

It is here that one of the most painful chapters in the history of this country took place nearly 60 years ago.

In 1968, the apartheid regime began demolishing District Six to make way for a whites-only suburb.

More than 60,000 people were forcibly removed. Families were torn apart. An entire community and way of life was destroyed.

Over the course of two decades, the apartheid regime forcibly removed more than 3.5 million people in District Six, Sophiatown, Marabastad, Cato Manor, Kroonstad, Nelspruit and many other places across the country.

It was one of the largest mass removals of people in modern history.

There are some in this House today who have memories of their families being forcibly removed from their land.

There are millions more across the country who still experience the effects of this monstrous crime.

The people of this country know the pain of forced removals.

That is why we will never allow forced removals again.

That is why we have a Constitution that prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of property.

That is why we have a Constitution that requires just and equitable compensation be paid in the event of expropriation for a public purpose or in the public interest.

Our experience of forced removals also explains the Constitutional requirement that the state must take reasonable measures, within its available resources, to foster conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis.

Today, District Six rings with the sounds of families who have been returned to the land that was taken from them.

Yet, like the transformation of our society, the process of restitution is not complete.

There is still much that needs to be done to heal the divisions of the past.

I reflect on this part of our history, Honourable Members, not only because issues of land and redress have featured prominently in this debate, but also because understanding this past is vital to understanding the nation that we are working to build today.

At this important moment in our country and in our world, we must ask ourselves what kind of a nation we want.

Surely we do not want a nation which is separated by race, language, income and geography?

We want a nation in which all people enjoy equal worth and equal opportunity.

We want a nation in which the rule of law is protected and upheld.

We want a dynamic and growing economy in which small businesses can emerge and expand.

It is my firm and enduring belief that all of us as South Africans, as fellow citizens bound together by our history and our present, want the same thing.

We have toiled long and hard to build a nation united in its diversity.

We are firmly committed to the fundamental principle that South Africa belongs to all who live in it.

We are firmly committed to a society that is non-racial and non-sexist.

We want to live together in peace, harmony and equality.

We want to see our country succeed and grow.

We must not allow others to define us or to divide us.

At a time like this, we need to stand united as a nation, particularly now when we are facing harsh global wind.

This is not the time for any of us to rush off to foreign lands to lay complaints about issues that we can solve ourselves in our country.

We need South African solutions to South African problems.

While there are many diverse and different voices in our society, we must strive to convey a common message.

We must say to our people and to the world that we are committed to work together to build a society in which all South Africans are free and equal.

To build a nation that works for all.

Together we should be better at being weavers, ready to build a nation working alongside each other.

This is what the programme of the Government of National Unity is about.

And we will not be diverted from the path that we have set out.

And I repeat, we will not be bullied from our intent to work together.

As a country, this is a moment of continuity and change.

It is a moment of continuity because we are building on the substantial advances made over 30 years of democracy and we are taking forward the far-reaching reforms that we embarked on in the previous administration.

While some speakers have sought to claim the progress that is being made and these reforms as new developments and their own makings, we nevertheless welcome the fact that they have embraced these initiatives and are working to ensure they succeed.

The structural reforms initiated under Operation Vulindlela are well underway led by the Presidency and National Treasury and executed through intergovernmental cooperation.

We will move with even greater urgency and determination to ensure that they are implemented.

Working with our partners – business, labour and community organisations – we are making considerable progress towards resolving challenges in our ports and rail, and in laying the groundwork for an energy secure future.

We are introducing competition and dynamism.

These reforms are not incidental. They are key to improving the business operating environment, to attracting new investment and to creating jobs.

This is also a time of change. Not only has the composition of government changed, but there is a clear commitment to accelerate growth and transformation and to shift the trajectory of our economy.

There is a determination to be innovative. To expand programmes that work and have an impact and to end or redirect programmes that don't work.

As we do so, we are building on the work that has been done in previous years, not discarding it.

There has been much debate about the laws that were passed in the previous Parliament, and the policy and legislative agenda of this administration.

It is important to understand the powers and responsibilities of the President when it comes to assenting to legislation passed by Parliament.

We should be proud of our legislative process, which subjects every draft bill to several layers of debate, scrutiny and public consultation.

This process draws on the views of experts, the collective wisdom of Members of Parliament and the preferences of the South African public.

We should be proud that we are a democracy that is governed by such thorough processes and not the arbitrary whims of a ruler.

The Constitution is very clear: the President must assent to a Bill passed by Parliament unless the President has reservations about its constitutionality.

The Constitution does not permit that the act of assent by the President be subject to negotiation or to the terms of an agreement between parties.

The President must ultimately make a determination in line with the Constitution.

As we said in the State of the Nation Address – and as many speakers have emphasised in this debate – what we want above all is an economy that is growing, inclusive and sustainable.

We will work with all willing partners and we will mobilise whatever human, financial and other resources are necessary.

We will do the detailed work and the heavy lifting.

We will harness our country's considerable competitive advantages to drive growth and job creation.

One of these is the immense potential of our tourism industry.

Last year the World Economic Forum ranked South Africa as the leading tourism destination on the continent, citing factors such as our business environment, information technology and tourism infrastructure and services.

We are attracting new visitors to our shores and improving our visa regime.

Beyond South Africa's natural splendour, we have a vast and highly diversified agricultural sector that is a substantial contributor to our country's GDP.

Farmers, both black and white, are the lifeblood of our economy.

Supporting the growth of agriculture is key to our goal of inclusive growth and to creating jobs in every part of our country.

We are resolving the challenges in our logistics system that have constrained the growth of the sector and are expanding markets for South African agricultural produce across the world.

As well as abundant natural resources, as in our mining industry, South Africa has advanced manufacturing capacity.

We have skills, experience and know-how that we need to harness not only to develop existing industries, but also to establish new industries.

This is at the heart of our industrial policy. It is part of our just transition to a low carbon economy and a climate resilient society.

We will put these capabilities to work to build industries in areas such as green hydrogen, electric vehicles and renewable energy.

We will seize the opportunities of rapidly changing technology to build a digital economy, a digital state and a digital society.

The industrialisation drive is underpinned by significant new investment in infrastructure.

The infrastructure drive is gaining momentum thanks to innovations such as Infrastructure SA and the Infrastructure Fund.

These efforts will be accelerated as a result of the changes introduced by National Treasury to encourage greater public-private partnership in infrastructure.

Even as we do so, it is worth pointing out that public sector infrastructure investment is on the rise for a second consecutive year.

As we were reminded in the debate, the focus on new infrastructure development must be accompanied by maintaining and upgrading existing infrastructure.

Strengthening provincial and local economies is critical for inclusive growth.

Through the District Development Model, we are working to strengthen local economic development so that our municipalities should become the centre of economic growth and development and be well placed to provide better services to our people.

During this debate, we have heard from the Premiers about the vital work underway in our various provinces to stimulate provincial economic activity, attract higher levels of investment and create jobs.

Just listening to the work that is being done in our provinces gives a clear impression that indeed our country is on the move on a number of fronts.

We have said that infrastructure development is the flywheel of economic activity, and we are witnessing these multiplier effects on provincial GDP, local businesses and communities.

We welcome the massive infrastructure investment in several provinces covering projects in housing, bulk water supply, roads and other infrastructure.

Not only will these projects vastly improve the delivery of basic services, but they are also supporting job creation on a growing scale.

The visits by the national executive to our various provinces have shown great benefit and opportunities for synergy. We have been able to share best practice and give support to our provinces on a number of issues that they are dealing with.

Leveraging of public-private partnerships for infrastructure build in all provinces is proving to be highly effective in terms of pooling resources, sharing expertise and delivering mass infrastructure at scale.

We are seeing high-impact financial inflows into our provinces in mining, renewable energy, auto manufacturing, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and other key sectors.

This is a demonstration of ongoing confidence of domestic and international investors in these centres of economic activity.

For investment to grow, there must be a razor-sharp focus on improving the capacity of local government to deliver essential services that are critical to business activity, be they water, electricity or logistical infrastructure.

Strong municipalities are needed to achieve strong local economies.

We welcome the commitment of our Premiers to prioritise municipal governance and capacity building, and to support the financial sustainability of municipalities.

Clean water, proper sanitation, reliable electricity, effective waste management and well-maintained municipal infrastructure isn't just good for communities; it is also good for business.

It reassures potential investors that are exploring investment opportunities in provinces.

We welcome the initiative taken by several provinces to hold local investment conferences that have raised considerable pledges.

We call on our respective Premiers to direct the same focus and energy towards local development at township, small town and village level.

We have seen, for example, how the potential of rural and eco-tourism has been effectively harnessed by several provinces to support job creation, poverty eradication, small business development and community ownership of tourism resources.

By leveraging their respective competitive economic advantages, our provinces are perfectly positioned to power growth, turning every metro, city, town and village into a hive of economic activity.

As several speakers said, we need to continue working with our traditional leaders as they continue to play an important role.

We are seeing an improvement in the growing cooperation between traditional leaders and local councils. We want to see more integration and more collaboration between traditional leaders and our local government entities.

Honourable Members,

A number of members spoke about the importance of education as a great instrument of transformation.

We welcome the suggestions and proposals that were made during this debate.

Education is at the heart of inclusive economic growth, job creation and social upliftment.

The World Bank recently released a report on South Africa's economic performance and prospects for the medium term.

The report highlighted the role of education in strengthening our country's human capital in pursuit of economic and social development.

Democratic South Africa inherited a legacy of Bantu Education and we have been steadily working to transform the education landscape and provide decent, quality basic education for all.

We are working to build an education system that produces the skills needed by the economy.

This means, among other things, that our children must have a strong literacy and numeracy base from the earliest years.

We therefore welcome the emphasis on the critical foundation years through expanding access to Early Childhood Development and improving learning outcomes in the foundational phase.

We concur with the sentiment expressed during this debate that technical and vocational training must be strengthened if we are to develop the skills pipeline needed for the vastly changing world of work.

We are committed to the development of entrepreneurship as a pathway to employment.

We must work to dispel the mindset that self-employment is only a route for those who cannot be absorbed by the formal economy.

Compared to the rest of the continent, South Africa's rates of entrepreneurship are low and we must change this.

A thriving small business and cooperative sector is key to inclusive economic growth.

We welcome the ongoing efforts of the Department of Small Business Development to develop township and rural economies and enterprises, and the goal of creating one million new MSMEs by 2030.

We want a society that takes care of those in need.

As we drive economic growth and the creation of jobs, we are strengthening the social protection provided to poor and unemployed South Africans.

Despite severe financial constraints, we continue to implement pro-poor policies to uplift society's most vulnerable in the form of social grants, school feeding schemes and free basic services for the poor.

This is not just about tackling poverty and improving the quality of life of South Africans.

It is about reducing inequality. It is about giving every person a fair chance.

It is about investing in the people of South Africa and enabling them to realise their potential.

What has also been clear in this debate is that we all want a country that is transformed, and that has shed the heavy burden of its past.

There is a broad consensus across the political spectrum and indeed across our society on the principle of non-racialism.

Our empowerment and transformation programmes recognise that to build a truly non-racial society, we must narrow inequality and redress the harmful legacy of apartheid.

That is why we remain committed to these programmes.

We will not relent in our drive to expand the participation of black and young South Africans in agriculture and other sectors of our economy.

We will ensure that the Transformation Fund achieves its objective of providing financial and non-financial support to black-owned enterprises to ensure their meaningful participation in the economy.

These policies are about eradicating the differences that still exist in our society, not entrenching them.

They are about empowering those who have been disempowered and protecting the rights of all.

Later today, we will gather at Air Force Base Swartkop in Pretoria to receive the remains of the 14 South African soldiers who lost their lives in the eastern DRC.

We will pay tribute to our fallen soldiers and honour their contribution to the struggle for peace on the African continent.

Much has been said in this House and in the debate in the National Assembly earlier in the week about the deployment of the SANDF in the eastern DRC.

It is a debate that is welcome and necessary because South Africa's role in peace keeping missions is fundamental to the pursuit of peace, stability and development in our own country, in the region and across the continent.

The decision to deploy our armed forces is not taken lightly, particularly when that deployment may put our Defence Force members in harm's way.

While South Africa has contributed to the SADC mission in the DRC, we have always maintained that an inclusive negotiated resolution is required to achieving lasting peace in the region.

We therefore welcome the outcome of the joint summit of SADC and the East African Community in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania over the weekend, which agreed that direct negotiations and dialogue resume between all state and non-state parties, including the M23.

The outcomes from the joint summit are in confidence-building measures towards a sustainable peace, which will finally lead to the drawdown of the SADC troops.

As South Africa, we will do whatever is within our means to support the peace effort so that this conflict will finally end and the people of the region will finally know peace.

This weekend, I will be travelling to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia for the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

The AU has designated the theme for 2025 as 'Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations'.

South Africa and Ghana have been nominated to champion this theme.

We will focus on actively engaging the African diaspora to foster meaningful connections and encourage investment in our countries.

This initiative is about more than reparations; it is a powerful call for unity, empowerment and the upliftment of Africa.

Together, we will forge a resilient continent where hope thrives, allowing people of African descent to reconnect meaningfully with our continent.

We live in times of great uncertainty, impacted by geopolitical events way beyond our shores.

Closer to home we have considerable challenges to overcome if we are to build a country of freedom, true equality and shared prosperity for all.

This is a time of opportunity and hope.

The Government of National Unity represents the best of that hope.

We have demonstrated that we are prepared to put our political differences aside and work for the common good.

This government remains united in pursuit of a South Africa that improves the material prospects of every South African man, woman and child.

We are committed to upholding our hard won democracy.

We are committed to expanding the frontiers of opportunity for all our people.

As we do so, we are guided by our Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the rule of law.

As we rise from this debate, I am convinced that despite our differences, we share a common desire for a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it.

We share the vision of a nation that works for all.

I thank you.