



**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA  
ON THE PRESIDENCY BUDGET VOTE 2023**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, PARLIAMENT  
31 MAY 2023**

Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Deputy President Paul Mashatile,  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,  
Honourable Members,  
Fellow South Africans,

This Presidency Budget Vote is being presented on the understanding that all of us gathered in this House share a responsibility to build a new nation, to serve the people of South Africa and to improve the lives of every South African – leaving no one behind.

Above all, we all have a shared responsibility to uphold the Constitution, which affirms the inherent worth, fundamental human rights and dignity of every South African.

This shared responsibility reaches beyond the precincts of Parliament and the offices of State. We are called upon to exercise this responsibility, to build our country and uphold the Constitution fully cognizant that it extends across all parts of our society, from business to trade unions, from traditional leaders to religious bodies, from community organisations to citizens themselves.

As we face some of the most difficult and severe challenges since the dawn of our democracy, we are all called upon to be part of the solution. To make a difference.

As I introduce the debate on Vote 1, the Presidency's Budget Vote, I am keenly aware of the duty this Office carries.

At varying points in the history of this democracy we have met with both triumph and disaster.

Even though at times our problems seemed too large, too difficult to overcome, we however emerged from these challenges stronger and more united.

This time of crisis, difficulties and challenges will be no different.

South Africans have great expectations of all of us to make great efforts to resolve the many difficulties they face.

In the State of the Nation Address we outlined the work that government would undertake in the course of this year to both respond to the challenges of the present and to advance the clear mandate it has to build an inclusive economy that creates employment and alleviates poverty.

This Budget Vote gives us an opportunity to outline the progress that has been made since the State of the Nation Address.

Given the extent and depth of the challenges we face, the benefits of the work that is being done will not be felt immediately, but it clearly lays the foundation of the success that lies ahead.

What I can say is that progress is being made on a number of fronts. We are getting there. We will get there.

Our journey to where we want to go may seem long, but if we stay the course, difficult as our path is, we will get through our challenges if we keep on working together.

As we undertake the commitments outlined in the State of Nation Address, we have focused on those actions that will make the greatest impact. These are the actions that will both make a difference in the short term and that will lay the basis for sustainable progress into the future.

Over the last few weeks, the Deputy President and I have met with each Minister to identify the specific tasks that they and their departments must focus on over the next year.

The tasks that each of my cabinet colleagues will focus on, taken together, will respond to those issues that concern South Africans the most.

These concerns include the impact of load shedding on households, businesses, hospitals, water provision, food production and all aspects of people's lives.

These concerns include unemployment, poverty and the rising cost of living. The situation is worsened by inflation and the effects of rising interest rates on household debt.

South Africans are also concerned about gender-based violence, crime and corruption.

If we are to effectively address these concerns, we need first and foremost to grow the economy and create jobs.

A vital part of this work is to mobilise the resources and capabilities of all social partners. Over the last few months, we have been having engagements with representatives of business, labour and other constituencies, where we've been dealing with the collective actions that need to be taken to address the various challenges that constrain our economic growth.

This will enable us to focus on key issues which pose an immediate threat to the economy.

We have established three work streams between government and business focusing on energy, logistics, and crime and corruption. This will enable joint action, alongside other social partners, on these critical challenges.

Our overriding priority now is to end load shedding and achieve energy security.

In July last year, I announced a detailed plan to address the energy crisis.

I have since established the National Energy Crisis Committee to ensure that this plan is fully implemented, and appointed a dedicated Minister in the Presidency to provide a single point of execution for the energy crisis response.

Over the past nine months, we have made progress in implementing the measures that we outlined in the Energy Action Plan.

First, in line with our economic reforms in network industries, we have allowed the private sector to invest in electricity generation projects of any size.

Following that, more than 100 projects are now at various stages of development, representing over 10 000 MW of new generation capacity and over R200 billion of investment.

The exponential growth of private sector investment in electricity generation is proof that this reform is having a major impact. These investments will significantly close the shortfall in electricity supply.

What has been pleasing in this regard is that this reform process has attracted a variety of investors in the form of women-led businesses, black investors, local traditional investors as well as foreign investors from as far afield as China, the Middle East, United States, Canada, Turkey and Europe.

A province such as the Northern Cape has attracted no less than R100 billion in investments in renewable energy and is seeing exponential economic growth in the province with the resultant creation of jobs.

Second, we have accelerated the procurement of new generation capacity.

Three projects from the risk mitigation programme have entered construction, with a further five projects expected to reach financial close during this quarter.

Project agreements have been signed for 25 preferred bidders from Bid Window 5 and 6 amounting to approximately 2800 MW, of which 784 MW is already in construction.

In the coming months, we will initiate the procurement of more than 10,000 MW of additional generation capacity from wind, solar, gas and battery storage, which will further contribute to closing the shortfall in energy supply.

Third, we have enabled municipalities to procure power independently. Since we implemented this reform, a number of municipalities have embarked on processes to procure additional power of up to 1,500 MW.

Fourth, we are driving progress on the unbundling of Eskom into separate entities for generation, transmission and distribution.

Significant progress has been made towards the establishment of the National Transmission Company of South Africa as an independent subsidiary of Eskom.

I have asked the Minister of Public Enterprises to ensure that an independent board is appointed for the new transmission company by the end of June 2023, so that it can be fully operational as soon as possible.

At the same time, we are making progress in decisively addressing Eskom's debt burden.

The 2023 Budget introduced R254 billion in debt relief to Eskom, subject to strict conditions. This will relieve pressure on the utility's balance sheet, enabling it to conduct necessary maintenance and supporting the restructuring of the electricity market.

Finally, we are pursuing sweeping legislative reform to end the energy crisis once and for all, with the help of this house.

We have already introduced the Electricity Regulation Amendment Bill, which seeks to establish a competitive electricity market and support the unbundling of Eskom.

This will fundamentally transform the electricity sector as we know it, and will create a level playing field for multiple generators to participate in producing the energy that we need.

We will soon introduce another key piece of legislation, the Energy Security Bill, to streamline the regulatory framework and accelerate the construction of renewable energy projects.

I call on the Members of this House, from all political parties, to pass this critical legislation in record time, while adhering to required Parliamentary processes. We need to do so in months, not years.

At a moment of grave crisis, we must pull together and place the interests of the people of South Africa above all else.

Despite this progress, however, the performance of Eskom's existing generation fleet continues to deteriorate as a result of its age and a legacy of poor maintenance and underinvestment.

We face a difficult winter ahead, as demand increases and several units at Medupi, Kusile and Koeberg power stations are currently under repair and remain offline.

These six units alone represent approximately 4 500 MW of capacity, or between four and five stages of load shedding. The situation will improve as we return these units to service towards the end of this year.

Until then, our best hope of limiting the severity of load shedding is to reduce demand on the grid.

As announced in the State of the Nation Address, tax incentives have been introduced to support the rollout of rooftop solar for households.

Just as we came together to stop the spread of COVID-19, we must all act now to bring down demand over the winter months.

We can all make a difference by switching off lights and appliances when not in use, reducing the temperature setting geysers to 60 degrees, installing a geyser blanket or geyser timer to save energy and reduce your electricity bill, and turn off unnecessary equipment like pool pumps.

By taking these simple actions we can reduce demand by up to 1 000 MW, or one full stage of load shedding.

We must reiterate that the risk of a national blackout remains extremely low. There are many safeguards in place to prevent such an incident from occurring. Load shedding allows Eskom to keep the system in balance at all times.

The work we are doing to urgently resolve the current electricity shortfall does not diminish our commitment to a just energy transition.

We will stick to our commitment to reduce our carbon emissions by 2030 to within a target range which, at its upper level, is compatible with limiting global temperature increase to 1.5°C.

We need to do this to prevent the worst effects of climate change, including illness, droughts, floods and other disasters. We also need to protect jobs in sectors of our economy that have to decarbonise to remain globally competitive.

Where it may be necessary to delay the decommissioning coal-fired power stations temporarily to address our electricity supply shortfall, any decision will be informed by a detailed technical assessment of the feasibility of continuing to operate older plants and the cost of doing so relative to alternative energy sources.

It will also be informed by the timeframe in which we can expect new generation capacity and the impact on our decarbonisation trajectory.

At the same time, we will further accelerate the pace of investment in new renewable electricity generation as an important part of the plan to overcome loadshedding.

Viewed in totality, the Energy Action Plan is a springboard to a just energy transition, boosting the rollout of renewable energy sources, mobilising significant investment and creating new jobs in sectors from electric vehicles to solar installation.

As we work to end the energy crisis, we are moving ahead with the economic reform agenda to revive economic growth and create jobs.

Operation Vulindlela is working closely with the Department of Public Enterprises, the Department of Transport and Transnet to finalise a roadmap for the freight logistics sector.

This roadmap will shortly be completed and will outline the actions to improve the performance of ports and rail as well as measures to reform Transnet and create an efficient and competitive freight logistics system.

To address the challenges in freight rail and port operations, we are forging cooperation at a very practical level with businesses and unions in sectors such as logistics, agriculture, auto, mining and forestry.

Transnet is working to establish a separate Infrastructure Manager within Transnet Freight Rail (TFR), which will enable third party access to the core rail network.

In addition, partnerships with private terminal operators at the Durban and Ngqura Container Terminals will help to improve the performance of our ports and crowd in private sector investment.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> South Africa Investment Conference last month, I announced that we would be implementing far-reaching reforms to our visa system to attract skills and investment.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Home Affairs published a detailed implementation plan to take forward the recommendations of the work visa review.

This plan outlines fundamental changes to the visa system. These include introducing a trusted employer scheme to provide a simplified process for qualifying companies and streamlining application requirements.

We are establishing a points-based system that will provide additional pathways for visa applicants based on their income and qualifications to introduce greater predictability, flexibility and transparency into the visa system. We are also creating new visa categories for remote workers and start-ups.

Government has also rolled out the e-visa system to an additional 20 countries for tourist visas. In this financial year, we plan is to introduce the e-visa system for other areas such as business, study, general work and intra-company transfer visas.

Attracting more tourists, growing the tourism economy and creating more jobs in the sector is vital to our economic recovery efforts.

The most recent data from StatsSA and SA Tourism show the sector is firmly on the road to recovery. Last year nearly 5,7 million visitors came to our country, and in the first quarter of 2023 we received over two million visitors, more than double the amount in the same period last year.

As we work to shorten the time it takes to issue tourist visas, we are also unblocking funding for transformation in the sector. We are addressing the delays in issuing tour operator licenses and training tourism monitors to improve tourist safety in various parts of the country.

We are making progress on a number of other priority reforms, including putting in place a modern and fully transparent mining rights system, creating an enabling regulatory framework for hemp and cannabis, and clearing the backlog of title deeds for subsidised housing.

Over time, these reforms will propel economic growth and enable companies to create and sustain new jobs.

Five years have now passed since we embarked on an ambitious investment drive to raise R1.2 trillion in new investment in our economy.

As the 5<sup>th</sup> South Africa Investment Conference drew to a close on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, we were able to announce that we had surpassed that target, having raised over R1.5 trillion in investment commitments.

These commitments are steadily translating into investments in the productive economy, establishing new enterprises, expanding existing ones, providing opportunities to suppliers along the value chain and creating employment.

These are significant achievements in the midst of great economic headwinds, not least of which was the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the effects of the electricity crisis.

The mobilisation of investment from both local and international companies has been accompanied by focused support on small businesses and cooperatives.

For example, in the last financial year nearly 75,000 SMMEs and cooperatives received financial support through the Small Enterprise Finance Agency. These funding interventions created over 32,000 new jobs and sustained over 70,000 existing jobs.

Changes have been made to the bounce back loan guarantee scheme, which was introduced in 2022, to incentivise rooftop solar investments to reduce the effects of load shedding on small and medium enterprises.

The Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition recently announced the establishment of an energy resilience fund of R1.3 billion to help enterprises, including SMMEs, to mitigate the impact of load shedding.

The recovery of our economy relies on a massive increase in investment. As we have reported before, we have been working to improve the capacity of government departments, agencies, state owned enterprises and partners to prepare and implement infrastructure projects.

This work is starting to see results.

In its most recent round, the Budget Facility for Infrastructure approved blended finance projects with a total project value of over R57 billion. These are mainly bulk water scheme projects, port development and housing projects

On the basis of a fiscal commitment of R21 billion, the Infrastructure Fund will engage with financial markets to enable investment in these projects by private investors to ensure that these investments are realised.

By gazetting certain infrastructure projects as Strategic Integrated Projects, we are able to ensure that multiple authorisations, permitting and approvals are speeded up.

As a result, the total value of projects completed last year is R21 billion.

These include human settlements projects like Fochville Extension 11, Sondela Phase 2 and Jeppeshtown Social Housing in Gauteng.

Other completed projects include upgrades to national roads between Ventersburg and Kroonstad, between Mtunzini and Empangeni and the Polokwane bypass, and the development of small harbours.

The value of projects currently in construction is over 300 billion, including energy, water infrastructure and rural roads projects.

The development of a pipeline of green hydrogen projects with a value of over R300 billion is significant.

Among these projects is the Boegoebaai Green Hydrogen in the Northern Cape with a potential to create thousands of work opportunities when it commences.

This will lay the basis for the development of a wholly new industry that will draw on South Africa's natural resources.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus remains a vital intervention by government to create work and livelihood opportunities particularly at a time when the broader economy is not creating employment at the necessary pace.

This builds on the achievements over many years of public employment programmes like the Expanded Public Works Programme and Community Works Programme.

The stimulus created nearly 650,000 work and livelihood opportunities in the past financial year. These opportunities were created in areas as diverse as basic education, small scale farming, and arts and culture.

Of the people involved in the programme, 83 per cent are youth.

This brings the total number of participants in the Presidential Employment Stimulus since its launch in 2020 to over 1.2 million people.

Implementing government's programme of action rests on having a capable, ethical developmental state. To this end our focus is on strengthening the capacity of the civil service to deliver on its mandate of serving the people of South Africa.

We applaud the many public servants who continue to serve the people of South Africa with diligence and commitment.

To root out malfeasance in the public service, we plan to complete lifestyle audits of all members of the Senior Management Service by early 2024.

As part of our response to the recommendations of the State Capture Commission, we have prioritised the establishment of a single register for disciplinary cases and processes across all spheres of government.

Cabinet recently approved for public comment a bill that would expand the powers of the Public Service Commission, including giving the Commission authority over local government. This will go a long way to improving the professionalism and accountability of all spheres of the administration

Madame Speaker,  
Honourable Members,

From the advent of democracy, we have recognised that the challenge of poverty and hunger requires a broad range of interventions and programmes that work together to address the various causes and manifestations of poverty.

This informs the programmes we have pursued in human settlements, land reform, expansion of free basic services, provision of social grants and improving access to education and health care.

In addition to these programmes, one of the most important recent interventions has been the Special SRD Grant, which provided support to unemployed South Africans to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building on that experience – and looking beyond that grant – several government departments led by the Presidency are working to ensure that poor households have access to a comprehensive set of interventions that create pathways out of poverty.

This plan would harness the resources and capabilities of all government departments in an integrated and coordinated manner to enable productive livelihoods, maximise the impact of social security and social services, ensure household food security, and enable sustainable human settlements and land reform.

As announced in the State of the Nation Address, a proposal is being developed on basic income support for the most vulnerable beyond the SRD Grant. Work on the design options and funding mechanisms is expected to be completed by the end of July this year.

During the course of this financial year, the Minister of Social Development will lead the development of an integrated database to enhance delivery of social protection and enable poverty alleviation programmes to be integrated.

The achievement of affordable universal health care is vital for improving human health, reducing inequality and enabling South Africans to live more productive lives.

A major milestone towards this goal has been achieved with the adoption of the National Health Insurance Bill by the Portfolio Committee on Health, which will soon be debated in the National Assembly.

We commend the Members and staff of the Portfolio Committee who have worked so hard to process the legislation, all those organisations and individuals who made submissions and all those people who participated in public hearings.

As the NHI Bill is finalised through the legislative process and as it is implemented, we are determined to ensure that it both fulfils its goal of universal access to quality health care and builds on the significant capabilities of the public and private health sectors.

Progress is being made in preparation for the implementation of the NHI, including interventions to improve the quality of public and private health care and the roll-out of the electronic patient registration system across public health facilities.

The implementation of the NHI will be a momentous step towards achieving universal health coverage and creating a society built on justice, fairness, and social solidarity.

Let us embrace this opportunity to create a healthier, more equitable future for all South Africans.

We are determined that the implementation of the NHI effectively tackles inequality in health care in a sustainable manner.

It is a matter of grave concern that, according to the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, as many as 81 per cent of Grade 4 pupils cannot read for meaning.

Unless we grasp this challenge with the necessary urgency and application, this reality will undermine the prospects of millions of South African children and stunt our nation's development.

The Minister of Basic Education will therefore prioritise interventions to ensure that all ten-year-old learners can read for meaning. By the end of this financial year, an integrated sector reading plan must be developed and implemented across all provinces. This includes the provision of a package of lesson plans and reading materials.

I will be spending more time in enhancing the President's Reading Circle programme started by the Department, as I encourage all leaders and all South Africans to be part of the reading drive.

We are on course to eradicate unsafe toilets in public schools. Five years ago, around 3,400 schools did not have adequate sanitation facilities. Today, there are 750 schools that still need to be provided with safe and appropriate sanitation. These schools are scheduled for completion in this financial year.

As part of the successful Presidential Employment Stimulus, around a quarter of a million young people will be appointed and placed as school assistants by June 2023.

Ministers across all departments have been tasked to prioritise and massify the training of young people in the skills required to both implement government's programme and make use of the new opportunities opening up in the economy.

For example, the Department of Transport will provide young people with skills-based training as train drivers, technicians, transport engineers, among others.

The Department of Communication and Digital Technologies will establish partnerships to train young people in cellphone repairs, digital installation, maintenance and aftercare.

Ministers have also been tasked to provide training to young people to enable them to make use of the surge in rooftop solar installation.

Fellow South Africans,

The right of access to decent and quality basic services is enshrined in our Constitution.

When citizens are exposed to conditions that imperil their right to safe drinking water, it is the worst affront to human dignity.

Two weeks ago, there was an outbreak of cholera in Hammanskraal in Gauteng and in the Free State. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who lost their lives, and we wish those who remain hospitalised a speedy recovery.

Whilst an investigation is still underway into the source of the outbreak, we do know that cholera thrives in conditions where there is inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

The people of Hammanskraal have had to put up with water supply challenges for over a decade and unfortunately their plight is not an isolated one.

Two years ago, this administration reinstated the Blue Drop and Green Drop water quality monitoring system to monitor the country's water quality.

This will enable stronger intervention in municipalities that fail to meet the minimum norms and standards for water service delivery.

Last year's Green Drop report points to serious challenges in municipalities when it comes to managing water resources.

That municipalities are underspending or not even utilising critical grants to upgrade and maintain social infrastructure like water treatment facilities is unacceptable.

The Department of Water and Sanitation will continue its ongoing engagements with municipal managers, technical staff, mayors and councillors in districts to address this issue and provide support where it is required.

The challenges in water provision highlight the broader challenge of dysfunctionality in many municipalities.

We need to strengthen local government by separating the administration from undue political influence. For example, the appointment process of officials such as the municipal manager and chief financial officer could involve competence verification by national departments like Cooperative Governance and National Treasury. This would help to ensure people with the right skills and experience are appointed.

Insecurity and acts of criminality and lawlessness deter investment, scare away tourists and dent our image as a country. Those who bear the brunt are our communities who are living under siege from criminals.

Our focus is on improving the capacity of the South African Police Service to prevent and investigate crime, and to keep our communities and businesses safe.

In the State of the Nation Address last year, we announced that we would embark on the recruitment and training of additional police personnel. In December last year, these new recruits graduated from various police academies.

Ten thousand trainees will be recruited annually for the next two financial years, bringing the total number in the current three-year period to 30,000. Of these, close to 3,000 will be allocated to the SAPS detective services.

With support from the private sector, we are overhauling the 10111 call centres to ensure that people are able to access help when they need it.

Additional financial resources have been allocated to supply Community Policing Forums with much-needed equipment.

There are a number of SAPS operations underway to deal with the proliferation of illegal firearms, to tackle illegal mining and to clamp down on theft and vandalism of economic infrastructure.

Much of these intelligence driven operations are being coordinated through the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation.

We will not allow criminal syndicates to operate in this country and are targeting those at the top to disrupt their networks.

The newly established Border Management Agency is in the process of recruiting additional border guards and work is underway to establish One Stop Border Posts at the country's six busiest ports of entry.

Reform of our intelligence services is gaining momentum with the recent approval by Cabinet of the General Intelligence Laws Amendment Bill. This is a major step in implementing the recommendations of the High Level Panel on the State Security Agency, the Expert Panel on the July 2021 Unrest and the State Capture Commission.

The Bill provides a framework for the restructuring of the country's intelligence services, strengthens measures to regulate the private security industry, and addresses some of the shortcomings identified by the Financial Action Task Force.

Despite progress in the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, we remain a long way off from achieving a society where this scourge is eradicated.

South Africans refuse to remain silent in the face of violence against women and children. Working together with government and civil society, people from all walks of life are contributing to the pillars of the National Strategic Plan.

One of these pillars is legislative reform. In April this year the Domestic Violence Amendment Act came into operation. It forms part of the trio of laws assented to last year to strengthen the fight against gender-based violence and femicide, including through the introduction of harsher sentences for perpetrators.

Another advance is the substantial reduction of the DNA backlog. In support of DNA driven investigations, the forensic science laboratories in Gqeberha and KwaZulu-Natal will be revamped and refurbished.

To strengthen the response of the criminal justice system, additional resources have been allocated to the SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units. The number of Thuthuzela Care Centres has increased from 55 to 63 since 2020, with the most recent centre being opened in Jozini on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.

To advance the economic empowerment of women, over 6,000 women entrepreneurs have been trained to participate in public procurement.

Over the last financial year, the Industrial Development Corporation has provided around R2.1 billion net funding approved to women-empowered and women-owned companies.

Work is underway to ensure that the long-awaited GBVF Council is established and operational by March 2024.

We are pursuing our struggle against gender-based violence at a continental level through our involvement in processes to develop an African Union Convention on Violence against Women and Girls.

In October last year I submitted to Parliament a detailed plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the State Capture Commission. The Presidency is leading efforts across government to ensure that this work proceeds with urgency and that it contributes to ending corruption in all its forms.

The National Prosecuting Authority's Investigating Directorate is taking the lead by processing cases that have been recommended for investigation and prosecution.

To date, the Investigating Directorate is involved in investigating ten major categories of complex corruption in government and state-owned enterprises. These address 122 recommendations of the State Capture Commission.

An Integrated Task Force comprising the NPA and the Hawks is prioritising state capture cases and will continue to coordinate the response of law-enforcement agencies.

The Asset Forfeiture Unit is working on those recommendations made with respect to the recovery of the proceeds of crime. By the end of February this year, freezing orders of more than R13 billion have been granted to the NPA.

The Special Investigating Unit and its Special Tribunal continue to register significant gains in clawing back the proceeds of corruption in favour of the State. For the period 2022-2023 the SIU has made recoveries of R278 million, obtained preservation orders to the amount of R4.5 billion and succeeded with obtaining forfeiture orders to the value of R213 million.

A mechanism has been established within the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation to monitor and track the implementation of various SIU recommendations.

We see this as a critical tool that must be strengthened if we are to ensure that SIU referrals are disregarded. This is an issue I have raised sharply with Ministers in my engagements with them around their performance targets.

The National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council that was set up to advise government on a society-wide fight against corruption has been very active.

The Council has organised itself into workstreams that include legislative reforms and transparency, monitoring and evaluation, public procurement and whistle-blower protection, amongst others.

Strengthening the country's anti-corruption institutional architecture is one of the key recommendations of the State Capture Commission.

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development is finalising a review of our anti-corruption architecture for consultation with stakeholders, which we intend to conclude before the end of 2023.

The Department has committed to ensuring that reviews of the Protected Disclosures Act and Witness Protection Act are completed and these amendments tabled in Parliament this year.

Legislation is being developed to make the Investigating Directorate permanent and for it to be provided with full investigative powers.

Another milestone in the fight against corruption will be the tabling in Parliament of the Public Procurement Bill that is aimed at putting stronger safeguards in place to prevent corruption in public procurement.

Madam Speaker,  
Honourable Members,

We have often said that our progress as a nation cannot be separated from the progress of the African continent as a whole.

We will continue to work with our counterparts elsewhere on the continent to ensure the African Union has the necessary capacity to advance unity, development and peace on the continent.

To drive the growth, diversification and development of African economies, we are working to ensure that the African Continental Free Trade Area is effectively implemented.

Yet, one of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of the potential of the AfCFTA is the ongoing conflict and instability in several parts of the continent.

We are deeply concerned about the fighting in Sudan and the resultant loss of life. We support all efforts to urgently resolve this conflict before more lives are lost and more damage is done.

We remain committed to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement in Ethiopia and will contribute to regional and continental efforts towards peace and stability in northern Mozambique, Eswatini, the eastern DRC and South Sudan.

We are seeking to use our missions abroad more effectively to drive trade and investment. The Department of International Relations is working with other departments to ensure that our missions will seek out foreign direct investment opportunities, promote tourism and identify markets for South Africa's products and services.

Later this year, South Africa will be hosting the BRICS Summit. This is an important platform through which to advance our developmental objectives as a country and a continent.

We have forged strong political, social and economic ties with our fellow BRICS countries, which this Summit will consolidate and build on.

We share common perspectives on the importance of multilateralism, a rules-based world order and inclusive development.

As part of our strategic intent to further advance the African development agenda within the BRICS group, we are inviting several other African leaders to the summit.

One of the priorities during our chairship is to build a partnership between BRICS and Africa to unlock mutually beneficial opportunities for increased trade, investment and infrastructure development.

South Africa continues to benefit from its participation in BRICS beyond the trade and investment ties to the other member countries. For example, the New Development Bank, which was established by BRICS countries in 2015, has to date approved eleven projects in South Africa, valued at around R100 billion in areas like road improvement, ports, water provision and energy.

Our foreign policy stance is informed by the understanding that multilateralism and respect for international law are key to global political and economic stability. We continue to work for the deepening and strengthening of progressive multilateralism and reform of multilateral institutions.

There have been concerted efforts to draw South Africa into the broader geopolitical contest around the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Yet, we have consistently maintained our non-aligned stance, our respect for the UN Charter and for the peaceful resolution of conflict through dialogue.

Our understanding of non-alignment – which is distinct from the concept of neutrality – is rooted in the Bandung principles, which continue to guide the Non-Aligned Movement.

These include abstaining from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve any particular interests of the big powers, and respect for justice and international obligations.

From the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, our position has been that this conflict needs to be resolved through negotiation. South Africa is pleased to participate in a mission by six African countries to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

South Africa seeks to maintain good relations with all countries across the globe. As we work to strengthen ties of trade and investment, we also seek to build support for a more inclusive, representative and equitable world order.

We will continue to maintain an independent foreign policy and will use our presence in international forums to promote dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Where concerns are raised about our commitment to our non-aligned position, we have addressed them directly and openly.

In this regard, I will be sending the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Presidency as my envoys to the United States and European countries to explain our peace mission and to deal with various diplomatic matters.

Our engagements with a number of those countries on these matters have already drawn a lot of understanding and support.

With a view of dealing with various matters that have to do with our international relations I have recently appointed an independent panel, headed by Judge PMD Mojapelo, to enquire into the circumstances of the docking of a Russian vessel in Simonstown in December 2022.

The panel is expected to complete its investigation within six weeks and to submit its report to me within two weeks of concluding its work.

Madam Speaker,  
Honourable Members,

There is no denying the severe challenges that our country faces, nor the determination of all South Africans to overcome the difficulties of the moment.

The road ahead will be demanding.

It is therefore vital that we work together – that we harness our collective resources, energy and wisdom – to overcome the difficulties of the moment.

We have achieved outstanding feats of human development since the advent of democracy, but there is much more that needs to be done.

Let us work together to overcome the challenges of the present and build the better future that we seek and that all our people deserve.

I thank you.