

National Assembly, questions for oral reply

26 MARCH 2003

QUESTION NUMBER 01

Gen B H Holomisa (UDM) to ask the President of the Republic:

1. Whether he endorses the principle of clearly demarcated roles for Ministers and Directors - General:
2. Whether it has been found that the separation between Ministers as political heads of departments and Directors - General as accounting officers is applied by all departments; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details?

Response

In responding to this question it is important to remember that government has one unified programme aimed at the transformation of our society and bringing about a better life for all. To this end both Ministers and Directors-General are working together for the realization of our stated objectives.

1. However, for the practical implementation of our programmes there is a distinction between the roles of Ministers as political heads of departments (elected representatives of the people) and of Directors-General as administrative heads (appointed officials) of department as well as accounting officers. Such division is necessary to ensure that Ministers are responsible for policy matters, the overall policy outcomes, and Directors-General for outputs in achieving the policy outcomes, in essence the implementation of government programmes.

Regarding the division of responsibilities between the political heads and administrative heads of department the Public Finance Management Act of 1999 and the Public Service Act of 1994, as amended from time to time, are the two key pieces of legislation demarcating the respective responsibilities.

The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) directly vests responsibility for policy matters with political heads and responsibility for implementation with administrative heads.

The Public Service Act confers final accountability and authority for human resources (namely the employment and career incidents of staff) and the organisational establishment of departments on Ministers, while Directors-General are tasked with the efficient management and administration of their departments.

Ministers have the discretion to delegate powers to the Directors-General or to other members of staff. Cabinet has advised Ministers to consider delegating their human resource powers to their respective Directors-General. Such delegation would confer powers for both financial and human resource decision-making on the Director-General.

2. As explained in response to the first part of the question, the respective roles of political heads and administrative heads of departments are demarcated by legislation. In recognition of their role as political heads, the PFMA allows Ministers to make financial decisions on matters that may not be adequately provided for in the departmental budget.

QUESTION NUMBER 02

26 MARCH 2003

Mr O Bapela (ANC) to ask the President of the Republic:

In light of the situation in many parts of Africa which indicates that armed conflict, including civil war, is the preferred option for those seeking a change of government, and in view of South Africa's policy of promoting peace on the African continent, what are the prospects for the achievement of an African continent free of strife?

ANSWER:

The prospects for the achievement of an African continent free of strife, I believe, are brighter today than at any other time since many of our countries gained independence in the 1960's. Although we are still experiencing conflicts in a number of countries, we have, at the same time, witnessed a sharp reduction in civil wars and conflicts in recent years.

Many parts of the continent continue to consolidate democracy and put in place the necessary mechanisms for good economic and political governance, which, as we know, are critical for ensuring lasting peace and stability.

The premier organisation of the African people, the African Union (AU), is seized with the matter of peace and stability as is demonstrated by our ongoing efforts in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Cote d'Ivoire and the successful resolution of the conflicts in the Comoros and Angola. We are giving urgent attention to the recent developments in the Central African Republic.

At the same time, Honourable Members, it is incorrect to suggest, as part of the question does, that there are 'many parts of Africa which indicates that armed conflict, including civil war, is the preferred option for those seeking a change of government'. In reality, there are only few countries that are currently experiencing the unnecessary problems of civil wars and conflicts.

It is clear that the majority of our countries have adopted a democratic route as a means of expressing their political views. This positive development is the result of the emergence, especially in the last decade, of an important and growing movement of political leaders, workers, business people, women, youth, religious organisations and the intelligentsia that have worked hard together to bring about democracy, peace and stability in many countries of our continent.

In large measure, this important and progressive movement was reflected by the decisions of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Algiers in 1999, which culminated in the Lome Declaration the following year. Through this decision, the leadership on the African continent, expressed a collective view that they unequivocally reject any change of government by unconstitutional means.

Furthermore, one of the important structures of the African Union is the Peace and Security Council that would be critical to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the continent. Individual parliaments are in the process of ratifying the relevant Protocol dealing with this Council and I am confident that this structure will be established this year.

I therefore say that the prospects for the achievement of an African continent free of strife are good, because the majority of Africans reject conflicts for they know the destructive effects of war. Many leaders and ordinary people on the continent know that the regeneration of our countries is not possible in a situation of conflict and have therefore resolved to work together to bring about stability, peace and development.

QUESTION NUMBER 03

26 MARCH 2003

Adv Z L Madasa (ACDP) to ask the President of the Republic: Whether there are any challenges facing African unity that may retard progress in the African Union towards the realization of the vision of African Renaissance and the Nepad programme; if so, what are the challenges?

ANSWER:

There are indeed a number of challenges facing all of us as we strive for African Unity and the realization of the vision of an African Renaissance.

In pursuit of the goal of the African unity and the attainment of the renewal of our continent, we have created two principal instruments, the African Union and its development programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

The main challenge with regard to the African Union is the creation of the necessary institutions that are provided for in the Constitutive Act of this continental body. As we are aware, there have been delays, for instance, with regard to the ratification of the protocol on the establishment of the Peace and Security Council. I must say that I am happy to hear that this protocol has already been tabled in this parliament and has been referred to the relevant committees.

Clearly, it is not easy to set up these institutions because one of the challenges facing all of us on this continent is the question of capacity as well as lack of the required resources to ensure the speedy formation of these structures.

Furthermore, for us to accelerate the process of African unity and realize the vision of African renewal, we must create critical structures such as the African Court of Justice, the Pan African Parliament, the Peace and Security Council and others. Yet, the challenge is that we need resources to ensure that these structures are in place and have the required capacity to discharge their mandated responsibilities.

We are all aware that it is impossible to forge real continental unity in the face of conflicts and wars, and therefore we have to deploy peace-keeping forces to restore stability. Again, this would require resources for us to accomplish our peace missions.

Although we have resource limitations, we will continue to make our humble contribution with regard to all these challenges. This includes the work that we are doing in training, together with the WTO, African trade negotiators, the hosting of NEPAD secretariat which has specific financial implications as well as the possible hosting of the Pan African Parliament. All these are the challenges facing African unity and if not properly handled, may indeed retard progress of the African Union towards the realisation of the dream of the African Renaissance.

QUESTION NUMBER 05

26 MARCH 2003

Mr S M Rasmeni (ANC) to ask the President of the Republic: In light of the Government's policy to reverse and overcome the (a) racial, (b) gender and (c) spatial disparities previously entrenched in the social system by apartheid, what concrete steps have been taken by the Government to reverse this situation in each case?

Answer:

The challenges of racism, sexism and spatial disparities are obviously still with us today. There is no doubt that the legacy of a system that perpetuated these inequities for centuries cannot be overcome in a matter of nine years.

Accordingly, the totality of government programmes is aimed at eradicating this legacy so that we ensure that our country is defined by equality, non-racialism, non-sexism and prosperity amongst all its citizens. I am sure that we would all agree that the problems of racism, sexism and spatial divide are interlinked. Therefore, the response of government to these challenges has been comprehensive and integrated.

We pursue a far-reaching programme of housing, electrification, sanitation and water supply because we have to address and reverse the disparities entrenched by apartheid. We provide free housing because we have to assist the poor amongst our people to have proper shelter and move away from slum conditions.

We have to supply water and electricity to the poor people, especially in rural areas so that, amongst others we free women from the burdensome daily routine of walking long distances to fetch water and firewood.

Since the democratic dispensation came into effect, we have annually increased the amount of the social grants as well as the number of beneficiaries to the extent that we have created the possibility of improving the lives of the millions of poor and marginalized South Africans. This is the same with regard to the expansion of health services to areas and people that were, in the past, denied these important amenities.

Furthermore, government has a comprehensive programme around human resource development and education, specifically dealing with the important matter of assistance to poor students, through the National Students Financial Aid Scheme, thus addressing the issue of race and gender on the question of access to education.

In addition, by opening the better-resourced schools and education institutions that were reserved only for white learners and students, we have gone a long way in our programme of reversing the racial, gender and spatial disparities of the past. Part of this important work is the building and upgrading of schools in poor and disadvantaged areas so that all the people of our country have access to education.

We will continue with the programme of land restitution so that we correct the wrong that has been committed against millions of our people. At the same time, we are ensuring that we address the spatial disparities caused by, amongst others, the policy of forced removals.

As we know, the central challenge facing our government is the eradication of poverty. Poverty patterns in our country are clearly reflective of the past policies of racism, discrimination against women and the painful neglect of particularly rural people. The programmes that I have spoken about, as well as many others are concrete steps, taken by government to reverse the negative legacy of apartheid.

In this regard, the economic empowerment of black people is important. This we are doing through the Black Economic Empowerment process, the SMME development, Employment equity and procurement policy that seeks to ensure that all South Africans have an equal share in the economy of our country.

Since 1994, we have passed many pieces of legislation in this House aimed at addressing this very question of reversing the legacy of apartheid. We have gone further to ensure the implementation of these laws so that we create a better and prosperous country for all the people of this country.

I thank you.

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