

Address at the Opening of Parliament

National Assembly, Cape Town, 25 June 1999

Madame Speaker and Deputy Speaker,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces and Deputy Chairperson,
Premiers of our Provinces,
Distinguished representatives of local government,
Deputy President of the Republic,
Honourable Members of our National Parliament,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished guests:

We are on course.

Steadily, the dark clouds of despair are lifting, giving way to our season of hope.

Our country which, for centuries, has bled from a thousand wounds is progressing towards its healing.

The continuing process of social and national emancipation, to which we are all subject, constitutes an evolving act of self-definition.

At the dawn of a new life, our practical actions must ensure that none can challenge us when we say - we are a nation at work to build a better life!

When the millions of our people went to vote three weeks ago in peaceful elections that were free and fair, they guaranteed the permanence of the foundations from which we will advance to meet this objective.

To these masses we owe the obligation to recommit the government on whose behalf I speak, to the construction of a people-centred society. This I am happy to do with all the authority at my command.

What will guide us in everything we do will be the challenge to build a caring society.

This society must guarantee the dignity of every citizen on the basis of a good quality of life for every woman, man and child, without regard to race, colour or disability.

It must be sustained by a growing economy capable of extending sustainable and equitable benefits to all our people.

We seek to replace a society which, in many instances, has been and continues to be brutal and brutish in the extreme.

Over the centuries this has condemned millions to a catastrophic loss of national identity and human dignity, land dispossession, classification and denigration as sub-humans and the systematic destruction of families and communities.

The society we seek to replace was, to a very significant degree, built on the law of the jungle of the survival of the fittest.

Accordingly, the weakest who were denied access to power became the landless, the unemployed, the uneducated, the surplus people deported to the so-called homelands, the victims of abject poverty.

Among these are those in our cities and towns who have lost all hope and all self-worth, who have slid into a twilight world of drug and alcohol abuse, the continuous sexual and physical abuse of women and children, of purposeless wars fought with fists and boots, metal rods, knives and guns, everyday resulting in death and grievous bodily harm.

The society we seek to replace entrenched corruption in all areas of human activity informed by the notion that concepts of right and wrong are dead and, therefore, that everything that serves my personal interests is permissible.

What we have said shows the enormity of the challenge we face to succeed in creating the caring society we have spoken of.

For this reason this is not a task that can be carried out by the government alone. The challenge of the reconstruction and development of our society into one which guarantees human dignity, faces the entirety of our people.

It is a national task that calls for the mobilisation of the whole nation into united people's action, into a partnership with government for progressive change and a better life for all, for a common effort to build a winning nation.

The Government therefore commits itself to work in a close partnership with all our people, inspired by the call - Faranani! -to ensure that we draw on the energy and genius of the nation to give birth to something that will surely be new, good and beautiful.

We invite all those in our country who occupy positions of authority and responsibility to join in this new way of doing things, by engaging the people whom they serve and lead in the common effort to transform all of us into a people at work for a better South Africa.

One of the central features of the brutish society we seek to bring to an end is the impermissible level of crime and violence. Acting together with the people, we will heighten our efforts radically to improve the safety and security of all our citizens.

This will entail a variety of initiatives focussed on ensuring the effective implementation of the national crime prevention strategy. Let me mention a few of these, relating mainly to policing.

We will work to improve the professional competence and effectiveness of the Police Service by introducing new human resource development programmes.

I am also pleased to announce that new recruits with the requisite levels of education will be brought into the Service to help transform the Police Service into the pride of the nation. Appropriate measures will be taken to give these recruits the necessary training so that they can assume their positions as soon as possible at all levels, including the senior management echelon. At the same time, all relevant regulations will be reviewed to ensure the proper promotion and deployment of serving members, taking into account their competence, honesty and dedication and the need to end the racial and gender imbalances within the Police Service.

Steps will also be taken to review the conditions of service of the Police Service with a view to their improvement. This must also help us to ensure that we raise the public status of our policemen and women so that they are seen, correctly, as the frontline guarantors of the fundamental human rights to life, safety and security.

To enable our law enforcement agencies to translate this into reality, I am privileged to announce that a special and adequately staffed and equipped investigation unit will be established urgently to deal with all national priority crimes, including police corruption.

I have directed that the Ministers of Safety and Security, Defence, Intelligence, Justice, Home Affairs and Finance must finalise all outstanding matters which relate to the activation of this unit within a fortnight.

Co-ordination of all security organs will be improved in accordance with the provisions of the National Crime Prevention Strategy.

Taking into account developments since its passage and to ensure that nobody benefits from the proceeds of crime, amendments to the Prevention of Organised Crime Act will be introduced.

Legislation against money laundering will also be introduced.

Legislation will also be introduced to ensure that we can deal mercilessly with all crimes involving guns, including the illegal possession of firearms, the killing of police officers, corruption within the criminal justice system and the intimidation of witnesses.

A study conducted by the Co-ordination and Implementation Unit in the Office of the Deputy President has confirmed what surely all of us have known, of the correlation between poverty, crime and race.

The areas of high crime concentration, including all crimes of violence, are the black and poor areas of our country.

These include such areas as Tsolo in the Eastern Cape, Thabong in the Free State, Katlehong in Gauteng, Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal, KaNyamazana in Mpumalanga, Mafikeng in the North West, Galeshewe in the Northern Cape, Thohoyandou in the Northern Province and Mitchells's Plain in the Western Cape.

We will therefore make multi-disciplinary interventions in these areas, starting with a few pilot areas, drawing in all spheres of government and engaging the people themselves in an offensive to ensure that we reduce the levels of crime in these areas which are characterised by a high incidence of crime.

Measures will also be taken to strengthen the Community Police Fora to improve their capacity to mobilise the people against crime and to improve co-operation between the people and the law enforcement agencies.

As we have said, the partnership between the Government and the people will be one of the hallmarks of the national offensive against crime and violence.

We will also adopt this same approach of partnership with the people in the fight against corruption. In this regard, we must ensure that we pass the Open Democracy Act and move speedily to ensure the implementation of the provisions relating to the protection of whistleblowers.

The coming into force of the Public Finance Management Act will also increase our capacity to ensure proper control and accountability with regard to public finances.

New steps will also be taken to ensure the enforcement of the Code of Conduct for Public Servants as well as the proposals that emerged from the government and national anti-corruption conferences held during 1998 and 1999.

In this regard, standing arrangements will be entered into, requiring that the Public Service Commission and the representatives of the private sector account publicly for the actions to which they committed themselves at the conferences.

A further impetus will have to be given to the initiative of Religious Leaders against Corruption to achieve the "RDP of the soul" which Nelson Mandela spoke about.

I would like to take this opportunity once more to reiterate the commitment of our government to honest, transparent and accountable government and our determination to act against anybody who transgresses these norms.

The South African Revenue Service, the Police Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions will further strengthen their co-operation in the fight against financial and economic crimes.

The example set by SARS of openness with regard to violators of the law, regardless of social standing, will be maintained.

Urgent work is proceeding to determine the possibility of establishing special commercial crime courts as soon as possible as well as the gathering of the necessary complement of intelligence officers, investigators and prosecutors to ensure that we deal effectively with white-collar crime.

The caring society of which we have spoken must, of course, successfully address the challenge of meeting the material needs of our people.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) were implemented by our first democratic government to achieve socio-economic transformation and macro-economic stability.

The structural changes entailed within these processes were also to take place within the context of our economy becoming more competitive as it integrated itself within the global economy.

The RDP and GEAR will remain the basic policy objectives of the new government to achieve sustainable growth, development and improved standards of living.

At the same time, we will actively address any remaining impediments to investment and job creation. Where the structural changes already achieved allow us to evolve new policies, we will do so.

Among other things, the revised GDP figures announced on the 21st of June confirm both the structural change that has taken place within our economy and the fact of a more robust economic performance than the pessimists would have us believe.

The challenge remains for all of us to get to know the real South Africa and, in this context, to fight back to defeat a frame of mind which drives some among us to hope and pray for failure and to celebrate such failure whenever it has occurred, or when we have convinced ourselves that it has occurred.

Our task is to build on the achievements reflected in the economic realities reflected in the figures issued by Statistics South Africa at the beginning of this week.

Accordingly, we have to work to increase both the level of investment and the savings ratio. This will include further steps to eliminate any dis-saving by the state and to introduce incentives to encourage saving.

The improvements in the deficit and debt ratios indicated in the latest GDP figures, will also give us some space further to increase public sector capital expenditure.

This will strengthen the improvement in capital expenditure by public authorities and public corporations reported in the GDP figures to which we have referred.

The further transformation of the state machinery will result in changes to the public expenditure patterns, against personnel costs, in favour of capital expenditure, including maintenance.

These processes will also involve the provincial sphere of government.

The Municipal Infrastructure Programme is now beginning to progress. To increase the momentum requires further improvements in local government financial management.

It also requires concerted action to promote public-private partnerships, which must be constructed on a fiscally sound and sustainable basis.

These matters, affecting the critical local government sphere will be attended to in a vigorous manner.

Investment in the public sector is closely associated with the restructuring of state assets. Progress in this area has been made over the last five years. We are now at a stage where further important restructuring can and will take place.

In the telecommunications sector, there will be further developments with the issuing of new licences. This will have a further positive impact on the expansion and modernisation of our telecommunications infrastructure, the affordability of services to consumers and investment in the economy.

I am happy to inform the Honourable Members that former minister, Jay Naidoo, will continue to work in this sector to assist in its further development domestically and to promote the African Connection, which is a critical element of the African Renaissance.

Some of the most important developments with regard to the restructuring of state assets will relate to Transnet. In part, the priority given to this corporation arises from the fact that the transport and logistic system it contains underpins the success of other major investment projects.

These include the Spatial Development Initiatives, the Industrial Development Zones, cross-border initiatives, the industrial participation programmes arising out of the defence procurement as well as the overall export drive.

The complex work that had to be done to prepare the Transnet corporation for its restructuring enabled us to put part of the national carrier, South African Airways on the market.

I am pleased to announce that the winning bidder is Swissair which will acquire 20 per cent of SAA at a price of R1.4 billion.

We are very satisfied with this result, convinced that it will bring maximum benefits to our country, further strengthen our relations with the Confederation of Switzerland and again demonstrate in practical terms the importance of a measured approach towards the important issue of the restructuring of our public assets.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our new strategic partner and to thank the Honourable Stella Sigcau for the work she did to enable us to reach the important stage we have, during which we will deal with the other business units within the Transnet group.

Similarly, the liquid fuels and petro-chemical industry will be given priority, with the Ministries of Minerals and Energy, Trade and Industry and Public Enterprises acting together.

This will include finalisation of discussions with the Government of Mozambique with regard to a gas pipeline from their gas fields to South Africa.

The outcome of these processes will result in adding a highly competitive dimension to the productive economies of Southern Africa.

The Government will continue to intensify its work to facilitate investment by the private sector, ensuring that the institutions that have been established to promote investment and the system of incentives achieve the desired results.

Further to improve our effectiveness in these areas, we will shortly establish an International Investment Council.

This prestigious Council, which will include some of the leading players in the global economy who are driven by a passionate desire to ensure that we succeed as a country, will work with the President, as well as our leading business people and trade unionists to help us ensure that South Africa is an attractive destination for foreign investment.

Consistent with our determination to strengthen our partnership with the people for the achievement of our common goals, four Working Groups will also be established bringing government together with big business, the black business sector, commercial agriculture and the trade unions.

The development of small, medium and micro enterprises remains a top priority of government. Accordingly, new measures will have to be instituted to record more success than has been the case to date.

We have listened very carefully to what the actors in this area of the economy have said. Accordingly, the policy and institutional framework to support and encourage this sector is being reviewed.

We will announce new decisions in this regard within the next three months.

The Government will also place more emphasis on the development of a co-operative movement to combine the financial, labour and other resources among the masses of the people, rebuild our communities and engage the people in their own development through sustainable economic activity.

There are two other areas that have an impact on investment.

Interest rates remain high. The Reserve Bank and the Ministry of Finance will continue to address this matter carefully, conscious of the negative impact these high rates have on higher rates of investment and growth.

The other area that has attracted considerable comment is the labour market and its actual or perceived impact on investment and job creation. Much of this commentary is ill informed or promotes a particular ideological and political point of view.

The most recent independent study on this issue was published by the ILO in February, this year.

The report states that:

" One of the key findings of the study was that when compared to other middle-income countries, labour regulations on dismissal, fixed-term contracts and working conditions do not appear to be particularly onerous...A degree of numerical adaptability (at exit) does exist - thus dismissing the view that inflexible labour markets are at the heart of the employment problem...Unfortunately employers perceive that the recent "avalanche" of labour market policy now make it more onerous to employ. These perceptions, whilst they may not be rooted in reality when one considers the regulatory environment in other countries, do appear to be influencing the behaviour of the economic actors..."

The Government will continue to give priority to the issue of job creation. If perceptions or realities influence the process negatively, these must be addressed.

Accordingly, in keeping with the decisions taken at the Job Summit, consultations have been taking place with our social partners to identify such possible areas.

These include probation, remedies for unfair dismissals, dismissals for operational requirements, the extension of bargaining council agreements and certain provisions of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

We will continue to discuss these matters with our social partners to address the efficiency of the labour market.

Job creation, the opening up of opportunities for all our people to earn an honest livelihood as well as the protection of the rights of all our working people, remain matters of critical concern to the Government.

We will continue actively to address all these matters, including such important questions as skills development, the casualisation of labour, illegal foreign workers and workers whose rights are not protected.

All necessary measures will also be taken to ensure the implementation of all other decisions taken at the Job Summit. The necessary funds have already been voted to meet the commitments the Government made at this Summit.

All our partners have an obligation themselves publicly to report on the actions they have taken and are taking to honour their undertakings.

An important project that will soon be implemented within the context of the Job Summit will be the improvement of public buildings to enhance access and use by disabled people. This initiative, elaborated by the disabled, the National Youth Commission and Public Works will be implemented soon, as part of the programme decided at the Job Summit.

The Umsobomvu Fund for youth development and training will become operational as soon as the Old Mutual has completed its demutualisation process.

The Board of Trustees of the National Development Agency will be constituted shortly. Hopefully, this will assist in ensuring the further mobilisation of the people themselves to participate in the development process as agents working for social change and their own advancement.

I am pleased to announce that, immediately, the Minister of Trade and Industry will make recommendations to the Government with regard to those who competed to run our national lottery.

This important matter will be concluded within the next fourteen days. In a few months, it will be possible to allocate even more resources to the promotion of the good causes to which the Government and institutions such as the NDA and the IDT are committed.

The rural areas of our country represent the worst concentrations of poverty. No progress can be made towards a life of human dignity for our people as a whole unless we ensure the development of these areas.

The Government is now in a position to implement a rural development programme for the integrated development of the rural areas. This will bring together all government departments and all spheres of government, including the traditional leaders.

The integration we seek must, for instance, ensure that when a clinic is built, there must be a road to access it. It must be electrified and supplied with water.

It must have the requisite personnel, qualified to meet the health needs of the particular community.

The safety and security of the personnel and material resources which are part of the clinic must be guaranteed.

We must also establish the conditions which give the possibility to this medical point to radiate outwards as a point of reference with regard to the larger project of our self-definition as a people at work, building a better life for ourselves.

Consistent with our concentration on this objective, including the critical importance of jobs, the Government remains preoccupied with the issue of gold sales and their impact on gold mining, employment and export earnings, both in our own country and the rest of our Continent.

Working within the Gold Crisis Committee, we will continue to maintain contact with all relevant players both domestically and throughout the world to minimise the inevitable adverse effect on our country, people and our Continent.

The debt burden of those who cannot both carry this debt and achieve sustained development must be addressed.

In the same way that we have demonstrated our own commitment to contribute to the development of others less fortunate than ourselves, by forgiving the debts of some of our neighbours, we expect that those who are a thousand times wealthier than we are, will not seek to help us as Africans by rendering us less capable of standing on our own feet.

Further to improve the quality of life of all our people, especially the most disadvantaged, the Government will maintain its approach to reprioritise public spending to maintain and improve the safety net available to the most disadvantaged in our society.

It is however vital that we improve the quality of spending in these areas and therefore the delivery of services to the people.

This will be done by managing downwards the amounts spent on personnel, rooting out corruption and theft, improving management skills throughout the social sector and ensuring an integrated, inter-departmental approach to the delivery of services.

Special programmes will also be introduced to speed up the improvement of the quality of life of various sections of our population.

These will include the accelerated delivery of assistive devices for the disabled and the establishment of one-stop centres for abused women and children.

The Office on the Status of Women will present a gender audit to Government by September. This will enable the Government to evaluate the progress achieved with regard to the implementation of the Plan of Action on Gender, which the previous government adopted.

This will enable us to take such decisions as may be necessary to ensure that we continue to focus on the vital question of the development and emancipation of women as well as further integrate this issue within all government programmes.

The advances made in this National Parliament and the National Executive with regard to gender equity, point to the need to adopt a similar approach with regard to all other centres of authority and power in our society.

Similarly, the Government will tighten its tracking of the poverty question to ensure that government policies and programmes are actually succeeding to reduce the levels of poverty in the country.

The funds set aside for poverty alleviation will also be allocated without further delay and will be used not as handouts but as a catalyst towards sustainable development.

The Government will also review all the work done so far to confront the scourge of HIV/AIDS with a view to the intensification of all efforts relating to this epidemic.

Of critical importance will be that we take all necessary steps to ensure that the partnerships against HIV/AIDS that have been formed and the public education campaigns we have been conducting do actually result in changing behaviour patterns, improve support to AIDS victims and orphans and speed up steps towards the development of a vaccine.

An historic document of the people of our country asserts that as a consequence of the victory of the struggle for national liberation - the doors of education and culture shall be open to all! Many people, including our youth, died and sacrificed for the realisation of this objective. They did so because they understood the importance for themselves and all our communities of the right to freedom from ignorance.

Consistent with this correct view, we must ensure that education and training constitute the decisive drivers in our effort to build a winning nation.

The Government will therefore intensify its focus on education so that we succeed in our effort to produce an educated and appropriately skilled population.

A great deal of work has been done in this area affecting all levels of education and training. We will therefore ensure that existing policies and programmes are carried out with a sense of urgency and commitment to their success.

To achieve these results, we will also have to engage in massive in-service training programmes for educators in all fields and at all levels, as well as the transformation of pre-service training.

We will have to focus on an outcomes-based assessment as well as on quality management systems. Our human resource development strategies will only succeed if the people assigned to develop our human resources have the capacity to do so.

All necessary steps must and will be taken to ensure that learners learn, educators educate and managers manage.

Once more we will also take the necessary measures to mobilise the people, including parents, so that we succeed as a country to meet the challenge of educating all our people in a manner that is consistent with the demands imposed on everybody by the process of globalisation.

The Government is also determined to ensure that the machinery of state is geared towards serving the people in keeping with the vision of "Batho pele!"

We will speed up the completion of the Skills and Service Audits currently being carried out. This audit is aimed at defining service needs, the availability of skills and the possibilities for redeployment to support the process of the restructuring of the public service.

Action will be taken on the basis of this study, as well as other initiatives, to right-size the public service, improve skills levels, improve the quality of management and release more resources for the actual provision of services to the people.

We will also work with the South African Local Government Association to lend all necessary assistance to ensure that this sphere of government improves its effectiveness and efficiency, bearing in mind that this is the point at which our entire system of governance delivers services to the people.

In this context, we must make the point that to overcome the problem of urban poverty, will require that local government adopts and pursues a consistent programme of poverty relief, without discrimination on the basis of race or colour.

Our Government is ready and willing to support this effort.

The promotion and protection of the cultural, linguistic and religious rights of all our people must occupy a central place in the work of the Government.

It should not happen that anyone of us should feel a sense of alienation. Whatever the sicknesses of our society, none should be driven to levels of despair which drive them to a peripheral existence at the fringes of the mainstream.

Nor should we allow that those who were denied their identity, including the Khoi and the San, continue to exist in the shadows, a passing historical relic and an object of an obscene tourist curiosity.

We consider the work of restoring the pride and identity of all our people of vital importance to the task of advancing the human dignity of all our citizens and ensuring the success of our efforts towards national reconciliation and nation building.

We will work for the speedy implementation of the constitutional requirement to establish a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Language, Cultural and Religious Rights.

We will also work with the traditional leaders to resolve all outstanding matters relating to the important question of the role of our traditional leaders in our system of governance.

The Ministries of Sports and Recreation as well as Arts, Culture, Science and Technology will play a special role with regard to the critical work to ensure that all our cultures and languages occupy their rightful place within the rich tapestry that constitutes our diverse being as a people.

This will be an important contribution to the effort we must sustain to wipe out the legacies of racism and sexism, which continue to afflict our society.

Capacity will also be created within the Presidency to ensure that our Government, at its highest levels, gives attention to all these questions which bear on nation building.

The Government will also focus on the tasks of achieving the objectives of the African Renaissance and ensuring that the next century evolves as the African century.

We will therefore contribute whatever we can towards the resolution of conflicts on our Continent. We cannot accept that war, violent conflict and rapine are a permanent condition of existence for us as Africans.

Nor can we accept that our Continent, endowed with enormous human and natural resources, is incapable of achieving sustained development.

Everyday all those who will hear and see are exposed to the extraordinary integrated cultural heritage which both captures our African past and is an important factor that will contribute towards the recovery of our pride and identity.

Gradually, Africa will work her way towards the resumption of her rightful place among the continents of our globe.

Where necessary, we will call on the services of such outstanding African statespersons as former Presidents Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Sir Ketumile Masire and Nelson Mandela to assist in the promotion of this agenda.

As part of the world community of nations, we will make our due contribution to the construction of a new world order that will be responsive to the needs of especially the poor of the world.

For us to succeed in our work, both as a Government and a people, will require that we approach the tasks ahead with all due seriousness and a sense of discipline which recognises the fact that all rights are accompanied by obligations.

It will require that all of us defend the freedoms and the system of governance guaranteed and created by our Constitution, underpinned by the understanding that the people are the final guarantors of our democracy, the subject of all government policies and their own liberators.

As the people went to the polls earlier this month, protected among others by our National Defence Force, which had also acted to defend life and democracy in Lesotho, they expected that the government they would elect would work selflessly to respond to their needs and aspirations, bearing in mind resource limitations.

We dare not and will not disappoint that expectation.

As a tribute to these masses, I would like to salute all the provincial winners of the President's Award for Community Initiative.

I am happy to announce that the national winner of the Award, whose work focussed on such important issues as poverty alleviation, the emancipation of women, the rebuilding of communities, domestic violence and providing education on HIV/AIDS, is the Makgaung Community Project of the Northern Province.

May the selfless and creative work carried out by the women of the Northern Province serve to inspire all of us to spare no effort in the struggle to create a caring society.

We sit in this parliament, authorised by these women from the Northern Province and others who mirror them throughout our country, to work as their representatives.

We must assume that they were wise to have selected us.

If they were, as we must accept in our self interest that they were, this we must accept also that none of us should forsake their wisdom, as it will watch over us as we carry out our tasks.

Their wisdom will protect us, exalt and honour us, even as it costs us all we have, including the vanity of our prejudices.

If, by word and deed, we take our places among the ordinary people who position themselves among a nation that is at work to build a better life for all within a caring society, then should we expect that the poor of our world will set a garland of grace on our heads and present each and everyone of us with a crown of splendour.

Thus will we all arrive at the starting point - that we are on course!

Thank you.