

OPENING — OF THE PROVINCIAL — LEGISLATURE ADDRESS

08 AUGUST 2024 | 10H00

City Hall, Bloemfontein



Hon. MaQueen
Letsoha-Mathae
Premier of the Free State



30 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY, PARTNERSHIP AND GROWTH



FREE STATE PROVINCE



LEAVE NO
ONE BEHIND



Honourable Speaker of the Legislature
Honourable Members of the Legislature and the Executive Council
Honourable Members of the National Assembly and the NCOP
Judge President and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary
Boetapele ba Ntlo ya Marena le Ma-Khoisan
The Leadership of SALGA and our Municipalities
The Provincial Commissioner of SAPS
The Regional Commissioner of Correctional Services
Leaders of Chapter Nine Institutions
Leaders of the African National Congress and the Alliance
All our Special Guests
Ladies and Gentleman

Honourable Speaker

I have graciously accepted the responsibility to serve as the **Free State Premier** for this **7th Administration**. I am sincerely humbled by the trust the **ANC** has bestowed on me.

But none of this would have been possible without the conviction of our people. I am deeply grateful for the support of the people of our province.

Your voices have been loud and clear, signifying your unshakable belief in the **ANC**. These elections bear testimony to the dictates of the **Freedom Charter** that, “**the people shall govern** and that **no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people.**”



I undertake to uphold the trust and confidence bestowed upon me in this position. I understand that power carries significant responsibility.

Over the past **four** months of our election campaign, we began a journey to visit every household with the message: “**Let’s Do More, Together.**”

We expressed a humility call to our communities to vote the **ANC** to further advance and consolidate the democratic gains of the past **thirty** years.

Our election manifesto was anchored on the following key **six** priorities:

- **Priority 1.** Put South Africa to work
- **Priority 2.** Build industries to achieve an inclusive economy
- **Priority 3.** Tackle the high cost of living
- **Priority 4.** Invest in people and ensure local government delivers
- **Priority 5.** Defend democracy and advance freedom
- **Priority 6.** Build a better Africa and World

These remain the strategic goals that we will pursue. The elections may be over, but the campaign is not over! The campaign to regain the trust of our people and restore the glory of the **ANC**.

The campaign to deliver services to our communities has just begun. We reaffirm our commitment to prioritise the collective needs and interests of the people, and give practical meaning to their hopes and aspirations.



Through their vote, the people have directed us to do things differently. They want a more responsive and accountable government that works.

Honourable Speaker

We are meeting during an important month in which we celebrate the contribution of women towards the freedom we enjoy today.

As we celebrate this month, we are reminded of **Victoria Mxenge** who was brutally murdered by the apartheid regime on **1 August 1985**.

Their contribution towards a democratic dispensation can be traced back to **1913**, when **Free State** women in **Winburg** demonstrated against the pass laws. This action of defiance spread to other towns in the province, which include **Bloemfontein**, **Fauriesmith** and other parts of the country.

With this act of bravery, women demonstrated that their unity of purpose can surpass any other challenge. We celebrate and honour their courage.

But today we are faced with the scourge of **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide**. As women, we have the capacity to confront this pandemic.

Mosadi o tshwara thipa bohaleng!

And we call upon men to take the frontline in this battle.



Honourable Speaker

Given our experience, we now know what works better, what does not work, and what needs to be done. Valuable lessons have been learned.

We will address unemployment, reignite economic growth, eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. These goals go beyond mere intentions; they reflect our unwavering commitment to create a better life for all.

We dare not fail, for we have come too far. Looking back at the past **thirty** years, we have made strides and changed our society for the better.

Today the **Free State** is a better place for all to work, live and prosper.

Today, the **Free State** is a much better place than it was yesterday. The promise of a better life for all remains as true today as it was in the past.

People have access to water, electricity and housing. The quality of education has significantly improved and universal access to healthcare is becoming a reality. Progress towards gender equality is notable, and efforts to build shared economic growth are on course.

However, challenges remain. Our work is far from complete. There are areas of concern just as much as there are areas of great opportunities.



Honourable Speaker

The new chapter of our democracy under the **Government of National Unity** compels us to work together, to harness our limitless possibilities to shape the present and future growth trajectory of our country.

Here in the **Free State**, we will establish a new thinking, drawing from our collective wisdom to make it work. Our strength lies in our shared interests, and together, we have much to offer.

The next **five** years represent a moment of great re-awakening and the ushering of a completely new society.

During his opening of parliament address, **President Cyril Ramaphosa** outlined the following priorities for the **7th Administration**:

- **Priority 1.** Drive inclusive growth and job creation.
- **Priority 2.** Reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.
- **Priority 3.** Build a capable, ethical, and developmental state.

We will implement these priorities with renewed vigour. Our actions shall instil a sense of purpose and inspire hope for change in our province.

Drive Inclusive Growth and Job Creation

Honourable Speaker



Attaining inclusive economic growth features high on our agenda. This is no surprise. Unemployment remains a crisis of our time. It perpetuates poverty, breeds hopelessness and deepens deprivation.

This is worsened by low economic growth, which is projected to be **1.1%** this year. Our provincial contribution to the national **Gross Domestic Product** is a marginal **4.9%**, while the problem of inequality continues.

BoMme le boNtate, it shall never be business as usual.

Our actions shall be both decisive and aggressive. No effort will be spared to grow the economy. For all of us, this is a now-or-never moment.

The agricultural sector holds immense potential for food security, high labour absorption rates and rural development in our province.

Considering that we are an agricultural province, we will increase our agricultural sector's contribution from its current base of **6.8%**.

We will prioritise the production of high-value crops, exports, and value addition to increase our agricultural market share and productivity gains.

Our growth strategy will include creating an agro-manufacturing complex to leverage our centrality and access to markets such as **Gauteng**.



Neglect of our rural areas will be a thing of the past. We will unlock their potential, and transform them into hubs of economic prosperity.

It is encouraging that **thirteen thousand, three hundred and eighty-nine** subsistence farmers have benefited from our **Food Security Programme**. However, lasting solutions require more than this.

Our rural reform actions will include the provision of affordable and reliable transport, adequate storage facilities, and improved access to markets.

We will repair and maintain rural roads, expand social services, protect labour rights, and leverage technology to improve security in rural areas.

Our **Agri-Parks Programme** and **Farmer Production Support Units** will continue to offer support to small-scale and emerging farmers.

Honourable Speaker

Mining is undoubtedly a sunrise industry. And to harness its immense potential, new mining opportunities will be identified to drastically increase this sector's contribution to the provincial economy from the present **9.8%**.

We will remove all barriers to entry and support small-scale miners in sectors such as sandstone, clay, salt, diamonds, and other commodities.



We welcome the deployment of a multi-sectoral team led by the **South African Police Service** to combat illegal mining by **Zama Zamas**.

We are happy that arrests are being made daily, heavy sentences imposed, and our economy protected.

We will continue to work with this team to reclaim our economy from criminal activities. **Foreistata hase mantlwaneng**.

We will also establish a sustainable post-mining economy and address the environmental impact of mining. Re-use of our mining infrastructure to support our present and future growth will be prioritised too.

The **4th Industrial Revolution** wave presents manufacturing opportunities that can ignite innovation to stimulate inclusive economic growth.

Besides the petro-chemicals, we will drive investment in sub-sectors such as textiles, food, beverages, chemicals, automotive, and metals through improved access to markets, skills development, and finance.

We will strengthen our existing partnerships with institutions of higher learning to enhance research, development and innovation.

Valuable progress has been made to revitalise the **Botshabelo, Phuthaditjhaba, and Thaba Nchu Industrial Parks** as manufacturing hubs.



And employment figures reflect this progress. **Eleven thousand, one hundred and fifty-nine** people are employed in these **Industrial Parks**.

Phase 2 of the **Rui Star Smelter** with an additional investment value of **two hundred million rands** in the **Thaba Nchu Industrial Park** has commenced.

To demonstrate our commitment to increase investment in the province, we are refurbishing factories across our **Industrial Parks**.

We implore the **Department of Labour** to conduct inspections across all our **Industrial Parks** to ensure compliance with employment standards and humane working conditions for our people.

And every year, more resources will be allocated for this purpose. Working with **SETAs**, we will make funds available for women entrepreneurs and their cooperatives to participate in our **Industrial Parks**.

Honourable Speaker

The future is digital, and we will not be left behind. We will unlock the potential of the digital economy through investment in **ICT** infrastructure.



We will change the digital landscape of the **Free State** by ensuring broadband connectivity of all government facilities by the end of this term.

A **Connectivity Plan** will be developed and funds will be made available to connect schools, clinics, hospitals and government offices.

Additional funds will be sought from the private sector, and our partnership with **Broadband Infracore** for implementation of **SA Connect** will continue.

The **Free State** has a rich culture, beautiful landscape, and great hospitality. So, our path to growth and development also lies in tourism.

More opportunities will emerge if we improve marketing, expand tourism routes, and support diverse ownership profiles of tourism establishments.

Efforts are underway to refurbish the **Sterkfontein, Philip Sanders, Maria Moroka**, and **Gariiep Dam** nature reserves.

We will explore prospects of **Public-Private Partnerships** to maximise the potential of these and other reserves throughout the province.

Labour-intensive job creation methods hold greater prospects to reduce unemployment and facilitate skills transfer. The extent and success of our **Expanded Public Works Programme** exemplifies this approach.



Through this **Programme**, we surpassed the **five-year** target of creating **two hundred and sixty-two thousand** jobs by generating **two hundred and ninety-three thousand, two hundred and sixty-five** jobs.

We will scale-up these **Programme** to instill a sense of purpose.

Honourable Speaker

Small and medium enterprises are the nucleus of economic growth. However, for these businesses to thrive, they require our support.

In this regard, we launched the **Youth Business Pitching Competition** to provide youth startup businesses with access to financial and non-financial support. We are collaborating with **Maluti, Motheo**, and **Goldfields TVETs** to give expression to this initiative.

We are pleased with our partnership with **Coca-Cola**, which is aimed at providing support worth **hundred million rands** to local businesses.

Current benefits of this partnership include support to **twenty-seven** tuck shops, mostly owned by young people in **Intabazwe** and **Makgolokweng**.

A total of **twenty-seven** small and medium enterprises have benefited from the **Free State Development Corporation** rental incentive scheme.



Over the next **five** years, we will introduce various innovative support programmes and incentives to expand access to finance, focusing on women, youth, people with disabilities, and military veterans.

We will rise to the occasion, and our actions will be intentional. There will be no excuse not to support local businesses. We will not be held back.

This is what leadership is about, and it is what the people expect.

We will strengthen the **Free State Development Corporation** and **Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone** through the implementation of turnaround strategies, capacity-building, and governance systems.

This work to reposition public entities will be concluded in this financial year. These efforts will bring focus and assist in attracting investment. Moving forward, payment of salaries in public entities will be performance-based.

Honourable Speaker

Infrastructure investment is not only important, but also urgent.

Infrastructure creates jobs, improves lives and enhances development. Most importantly, it connects people, cities, towns, and rural areas.



We will accelerate the construction, upgrade, and maintenance of roads, with local contractors, with mainly youth and women as the beneficiaries.

There is a **Road Construction Programme** in the **Department of Community Safety, Roads and Transport** where service providers set aside resources to train women in localities where they are appointed.

Some of the beneficiaries of this **Programme** have joined us today. They include **Deliwe Busakwe** of **Land Breeze Trading** and **Mpho Ntshalintshali** of **Sapholwethu Group Service**. These women are **Grade 6 CE PE** contractors. More women are being enlisted on this **Programme**.

We intend to replicate this model across all infrastructure projects.

We have noted with concern the practice of facilitating payments to service providers, without work being done. We will embark on a process to recover all monies which were unduly paid to service providers.

We have had an engagement with the **IDT** to ensure empowerment of local contractors. Our expectation is that all other similar **Implementing Agents**, which includes the **DBSA** adopt the same approach.



We will continue to strengthen our partnership with **SANRAL** for repairs, upgrade and maintenance of our roads.

To date, we have transferred **568.75 km** of roads to **SANRAL** for improvements. These include **R26** from **Ladybrand** to **Bethlehem**; **R34** from the north-western part of the **Free State** border to the **KwaZulu-Natal** border; and **R74** linking **Harrismith** to the **Kwazulu-Natal** border.

We will cede additional roads to **SANRAL** for repairs and maintenance.

On completion, these road projects will bolster economic growth, facilitate access to essential services, and enhance interprovincial connectivity.

We engaged with **SANRAL** on number of issues including to ensure that they establish offices in provinces. And because we are trend-setters, **SANRAL** will soon open offices in all provinces.

SANRAL have adopted the raffle labour recruitment approach to increase transparency used by **Free State** in infrastructure projects.

To leverage on our centrality, we will enhance interprovincial cooperation on transport investment. Discussions with **Gauteng** and **KwaZulu-Natal** to develop the **Harrismith Logistics Hub** will be initiated soon.

We will also develop plans to optimise the potential of regional airfields.



Our collaboration with the **Central University of Technology** to expedite pothole repairs of our roads through **Operation Vala Zonke** will continue.

The creation of safer and connected communities through our **Welisizwe Rural Bridge Programme**, in partnership with the **South African National Defence Force**, remains a priority. And with the acquisition of the yellow fleet, we will intensify the delivery of **Welisizwe Rural Bridge**.

Honourable Speaker

Throughout the world, many major cities are built near river banks. Not only are rivers the sources of life, but also trade and development.

We know this very well. That is why we will drive collaborative initiatives of the **Vaal River City Region** between the **Free State** and **Gauteng**.

This year, we will conclude an **Inter-Provincial Implementation Protocol** with the **Gauteng** that outlines the nature of our corporation. We will also appoint a project developer in the **2025/26 financial year** for the planning and financing aspects of the creation of the **Vaal River City Region** on the **Free State** side. Integration with **Gauteng** will be key.

Progress made so far with **Infrastructure South Africa** to develop a bankable project pipeline for the **Free State** is commendable.



Twenty-seven major infrastructure projects have been registered with **Infrastructure South Africa** for project preparation and implementation.

We are pleased with the **sixteen million rands** allocated for project preparation for the **Psychiatric Hospital** and **District Hospital** in **Mangaung**.

Project preparation funding has also been secured for **Maluti-a-Phofung Renewable Energy Projects** and **Mangaung Airport Development Node**.

Implementation of the pledges made during the **Free State Energy Security Indaba** and **Free State Investment Conference** is on course.

We are working together with the **Department of Trade Industry and Competition; Infrastructure South Africa** and the private sector to ensure these commitments provide impetus for our growth.

With over **eighty-eight billion rands** worth of renewable energy projects at different stages of conception and implementation, the **Free State** is proving to be a destination of choice for renewable energy projects.

From our investment engagements, we look forward to the construction of **Mabele Fuels** plant in **Bothaville**, **Petro SA's** expansion of its fuel depot in **Bloemfontein**, **Petroleum Agency South Africa** issuing of



exploration licenses to **Free State** businesses, and **Sunelex** construction of a solar complex in **Matjhabeng** among many other pledges made.

Let me take this opportunity to commend my predecessor, **Honourable Mxolisi Dukwana**, for spearheading the process to position the **Free State** as the country's central energy hub.

Honourable Speaker

In the next **five** years, we will work with all role players to see through the establishment of an energy **Special Economic Zone** in **Matjhabeng** as we position the **Free State** as the country's central energy hub.

To enhance our provincial capacity for infrastructure projects planning, preparation, implementation and monitoring, we will establish a central coordinating **Project Management Office** in the **2025/26 financial year**.

We will develop a **Project Management Information System** dashboard.

This will include the implementation of the **Infrastructure Delivery Management System**, which guides public sector infrastructure delivery.

At the core of our priorities shall be to introduce mechanisms through which to circumvent underspending of infrastructure grants.



We are outraged by elements who have resorted to destruction, intimidation and extortion to get a share of contractors' projects without doing any work. These are criminals with no respect for law and order.

To tackle these challenges, we will work with law enforcement agencies.

Reduce Poverty and Tackle the High Cost of Living

Honourable Speaker

We declare war on poverty. Poverty breeds deprivation and powerlessness. We want a province that is free of poverty and hunger.

A sizable number of households are experiencing poverty. And behind the numbers, are individuals without food, poor health and lost opportunities.

Regardless, it is only appropriate that we appreciate our successes in fighting poverty. The scale and reach of our social wage is substantial.

Of the **two million, nine hundred thousand** population in the **Free State**, **one million and one hundred thousand** people receive social grants.

And the **SASSA** pays out **one billion, four hundred and forty million rands** of social grants per annum in the **Free State**.



Honourable Speaker

But this is not all. As a caring government, we provide for the most vulnerable, impoverished and underprivileged in our society.

And caring for children is certainly, a better place to start. Under our care, we commit to serve, protect and provide quality education to our children.

Thankfully, **41.9%** of the **0 – 4** year-old children were attending **Early Childhood Development Centres** in **2022**. These figures will improve.

We will continue to increase our investment in **Early Childhood Development** through enrolment of more children, provision of learning material, training of practitioners and maintenance of the **Centres**.

Children deserve nothing but compassion, safety and nurturing.

In the same way, we take seriously the protection of the elderly. They are pearls of wisdom. And we will be judged by how we treat them.

Our **Golden Games** initiatives to extend their life expectancy and awareness campaigns are but an indication of the value we put in them.

This is also evident in our old age residential facilities for the elderly. Work to construct and refurbish our old age homes will continue in earnest.



The same care will be extended to people with disabilities. We will protect their rights and create opportunities for them to work and live independently.

Starting with ourselves, we will implement the proposals of **Building a Disability Inclusive Government** report next year. This includes the fulfilment of the set **2%** target of employment of people with disabilities.

The most rewarding investment for us as government will be the mainstreaming of people with disabilities in the mainstream economy of our province. Be assured that the next **five** years will be different.

Far too many people go without food every day. No one should go hungry.

That is why we have decided to provide nutritious meal to the vulnerable in our **fifty-five Community Nutrition and Development Centres**.

We will embark on roadshows aimed at creating awareness about all **social services** provided by **Department of Social Development**.

Honourable Speaker

Drugs and substance abuse is a problem. And sadly, the costs are devastating. Together, we will enhance programmes to fight this scourge.



All users will be persuaded to undergo rigorous treatment, rehabilitation, and life skills and development interventions in our centres.

To intensify our treatment measures, **twenty-five million, three hundred and thirty-five thousand rands** funding will be made available to **thirty-three Non-Profit Organisations** in the next **three** years.

Gender-Based Violence and Femicide is a pandemic. Families have been destroyed, souls battered, and tears shed because of this scourge.

We are saddened by the alarming scale of the killing of women who perished in the hands of men. We send our condolences to their families.

We are similarly hurt by everyday abuse of women and children.

As for the impact of **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide**, the effects are long-lasting. This needs to stop. Enough is enough!

High on our agenda is the intensification of the fight against **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide** through education, community activism, empowerment, law enforcement, counselling and the provision of shelter.

Practices that deny the voices of women to be heard will be challenged.



Efforts to transform notions masculinity and entrench good values in men to prevent **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide** will be supported.

More resources will be directed to **Thuthuzela Care Centres, Safe Houses, Shelters** and **Victim Friendly Centres**.

More qualified personnel will be employed in our centres to provide professional help to survivors of **Gender-Based Violence**.

Support will also be offered to members of the **LGBTQI+** community.

Honourable Speaker

Quality education lifts people out of poverty and unlocks their potential.

We are proud of our **Number One** spot as the best performing province in the country since **2019**. The **Grade 12** class of **2023** achieved a pass rate of **89%**, reclaiming the **Number One** position in the country again.

Our aspirations in the next **five** years remain to **simply be the best**.

Success will require that we work closely with the teachers, learners and parents all of whom are important to our education achievements.

We know we can count on your support. Continue to make us proud.



Even in the next **five** years, focus will still be on **4th Industrial Revolution** enabling subjects such as **Coding, Programming** and **Robotics**.

For this to happen, we will empower teachers with digital capabilities. Schools will be equipped with the requisite **ICT** infrastructure.

Investment in school infrastructure will continue. New schools, hostels, ablution facilities and offices will be built and others refurbished. Schools will be repurposed to better respond to our development priorities.

Ongoing initiatives to improve the performance of educators through bursaries, professional development and mentoring will be prioritised.

We are transforming the food security to enhance learning and teaching.

Our **School Nutrition Programme** feeds nutritious meals to **five hundred and thirty-eight thousand, and five hundred** learners in **Quintile 1-3** schools at primary, secondary and special schools.

Honourable Speaker

Of course, our growth and development success is dependent on the provision of quality healthcare. Factors such as urbanisation and changing lifestyles are putting immense pressure on our healthcare facilities.

Irrespective, we are edging closer to universal access to healthcare.



Data shows that public health facilities were the most used by **66.5%** of the households in the province and availability of medicines is above **90%**.

Just over **70.3%** of the clinics in the province obtained **Ideal and Office of Health Standards Compliance** status. Improvements are continuing.

Brick by brick, we continue to improve our healthcare infrastructure. We will double our efforts to refurbish, construct and maintain our facilities.

We will increase clinic operating hours, expand non-communicable disease programmes, strengthen emergency services, enhance the intake of health professionals, and implement a retention strategy.

This work is even more urgent with the promulgation of the **National Health Insurance Act 20 of 2023** to strengthen healthcare provision.

Beyond investment, owning a house is about building families and dignity.

Knowing these essentials, we will accelerate the construction of houses.

The good news is that **84.9%** of households in the **Free State** are living in formal dwellings compared to **13.4%** that are residing in informal dwellings according to the **2022 General Household Survey** figures.



These are important achievements, but still not enough. We need to do more. We will significantly scale up our efforts to deliver houses.

We will provide serviced sites for people to build their own houses and all incomplete houses will be completed in this **five**-year cycle.

Overcoming the housing backlog will require an increase in subsidies and affordable financing options. Provision of title deeds will be accelerated.

Failure to complete houses and the slow pace of delivery by contractors will not be tolerated. We will be tough. They will have to shape up or ship out.

By the end of this **financial year**, we will complete the process to clean-up our housing database. This will minimise irregularities and delays.

We will forcefully drive spatial integration and bring people closer to places of economic opportunities. Human settlements in cities will be inclusive.

We will purposefully pursue a working relationship with **Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality** and other municipalities to identify inner city land to promote densification and integration of communities.

More government land will be released for human settlements. At the centre of all this there should be empowerment of our people.



Initiatives to repurpose abandoned buildings will be introduced. Various models such as **Build-Operate-Transfer**, **Long and Short-term Leases**, **Refurbish-Operate-Transfer** and **Outright Sale** will be implemented.

Necessary support will be provided for the development of the mixed-use **Maluti Gateway Development Project** and the **Intabazwe Smart City**.

Honourable Speaker

We have come too far to see divisions in our society. We are a nation founded on the values of equality, non-racialism and human rights.

The **Government of National Unity** embrace these values. We embrace them too.

We will use sport, arts and culture to unite the **Free State** province. We will entrench the value of our national symbols, orders, anthem, flag and Constitution to celebrate our diverse national tapestry.

National days such as **Women's Day**, **Freedom Day**, **Mandela Day**, **Heritage Day** and **Human Right's Day** will be celebrated with the great spirit of patriotism.

After successfully hosting of the **Social Compact Izimbizo** in **Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality**, **Xhariep**, **Lejweleputswa** and **Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipalities**, we will complete the



remaining **Fezile Dabi District Municipality** engagement by the end of this year.

We listened to issues raised by our communities and a comprehensive programme of action will be developed to address those issues.

The **Social Compact** will strengthen mutual partnership, collective responsibility and coherence between government and social partners.

Build a Capable, Ethical and Developmental State

Honourable Speaker

A capable, ethical and developmental state is all too important to us. And in the next **five** years, we will build an effective and efficient public service.

As a start, we will reconfigure our organisational structures this year. We can never overstate the need for a streamlined government, that is fit for purpose, efficient and aligned with our development policy priorities.

Part of our restructuring work will entail the reduction of vacancy rates.

We are implementing the **Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service** to ensure the appointment of qualified and competent individuals in government. This is non-negotiable.



Besides being an obligation, this is an opportunity for us to reimagine our public sector as a whole, as performance matters more than ever before.

Now, recruitment is on merit and **Nyukela** entrance exam is binding. Extension of the tenure of **HODs** is based purely on performance and competency assessment tests for shortlisted senior management candidates is mandatory. In the future, all **HODs** will have to be vetted before being appointed.

An important aspect of the professionalisation of the public service is adherence to the **Batho Pele** principles. Courtesy is royalty. Our people expect no less than this in all of our government facilities.

Next year we will re-introduce the **Premier's Batho Pele Service Excellence Awards** to pay tribute to all hard-working public servants.

As the **Public Service Commission** has directed, there shall be zero tolerance for unlawful instructions in the public sector.

Honourable Speaker

Professionalisation of local government is also in full swing. Bloated structures, irregular appointments, poor performance and ineffective leadership are among the things that hinder service delivery.

And continuation of these challenges is a formula for future crises.



Our reality is that we have no choice, but to transform local government.

Work to assist municipalities in implementing the **Local Government Regulations on Appointment and Conditions of Employment of Senior Managers** will continue. We are committed to these regulations.

And we are now seeing the difference. **Section 56 Managers** are permanently employed as per the **Municipal Systems Amendment Act of 2022**. **Municipal Managers** are appointed on a **five-year** fixed contract.

Ongoing support to implement the **State of Readiness Assessment Tool** to measures **Change Management, Staff Establishment and Recruitment and Performance** in municipalities will continue.

Along with the development of staff establishments, our support to municipalities include the review of their competency assessments.

Honourable Speaker

Building a capable, ethical and developmental state requires sound financial management too. How, where and who benefits from public funds matter. We will be the guardians of the public purse.

We will never tire from improving our audit outcomes.

Our unqualified audit outcomes improved from **33%** in the **2018/19 financial year** to **44%** in the **2022/23 financial year**. As for clean



audits, they increased from **11%** in the **2019/20 financial year** to **22%** in **2022/23**.

This is uninspiring. We need to do more. So, we will implement measures to prevent irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

We will work with the **Auditor-General** to improve our audit outcomes.

Next year we will conclude a skills audit for supply chain and financial management officials, including security vetting. Cost containment measures will be enforced. We shall have to do more with less.

Payment of suppliers within **30-days** will be prioritised. We are pleased that between the **2018/19** and **2022/23 financial years**, **30-days** payment to suppliers improved by **50%**. We will drastically improve this.

We will continue to assist municipalities that received poor audit outcomes too. Support measures provided will cover areas that include municipal budgets, supply chain management, internal audit and risk management.

We have placed **Mafube** and **Tokologo Municipalities** under provincial mandatory intervention to rescue these municipalities from financial crisis. We are pleased to announce that in **Tokologo** there is positive progress.



Honourable Speaker

Fighting corruption and ensuring good governance are critical in maintaining the integrity and functionality of our government.

For a long time now, corruption has undermined the ability of the state to drive development and faster. Under my watch, corrupt officials will be delivered to law enforcement and prosecuted.

Corruption breeds, unemployment, poverty and inequalities. We will strengthen our partnership with the **Public Service Commission** and law enforcement agencies to combat corruption and maladministration.

Compliance with financial disclosures and lifestyle audits will be imposed.

We will implement consequence management in respect of officials who wilfully disregard the recommendations of the **Auditor General**.

To improve service delivery, we have begun a process by which to rotate **HODs**. These rotations are meant to encourage a more dynamic and innovative public sector. **“Change is never easy, but it is often necessary to achieve progress and success”**

Compliance with financial disclosures and lifestyle audits will be imposed.

Action will be taken in instances where there are irregularities.



Cases of officials doing business with the government will be referred to law enforcement agencies. We are implementing the recommendations of the **Zondo Commission**.

Honourable Speaker

Besides being professional, ethical and responsive, a public servant should embrace *lifelong learning*. *This is about competitiveness and relevance.*

The **Free State Training and Development Institute's** partnership with the **National School of Government** and institutions of higher learning to build the capacity of civil servants at all levels will be bolstered.

Apart from civil servants, we will continue to provide bursaries to young people to contribute to the growth and development of our province.

Effectiveness requires that we increase our Internships, **Learnerships, Apprenticeships, Work Integrated Learning** and **Artisan Development** intakes. Only when we do this, can we grow our economy.

In embracing the **4th Industrial Revolution**, we will spearhead a transformative approach to ensure the safety of our communities.

Currently, we are on a quest to pioneer initiatives such as training pilots to operate drones, and enhance our capacity to monitor our borders,



farms, public infrastructure, including schools, clinics and other facilities.

This will be enhanced by our partnerships with **SETAs** and the private sector, ensuring availability of advanced technology in the fight against crime.

In view of this, we are proud to announce a forthcoming partnership and implementation protocol with the **National Skills Fund**. This partnership is aimed at facilitating comprehensive training interventions for our youth.

The initiative will focus on providing accredited training in critical areas such as **Aviation, Health, Agriculture, IT** and **Border Security**,

In this financial year, we will create **thirty-four thousand** training and job opportunities in collaboration with the **Unemployment Insurance Fund**.

A total of **R1.9 billion** has been made available by **Unemployment Insurance Fund** for this purpose, and this programme shall go a long way in addressing unemployment and enhancing workforce skills.

Honourable Speaker

Figures by the **2022 Statistics SA General Household Survey** indicate impressive progress in improving access to basic services in **Free State**.



Ninety-four percent of the households had access to tap water inside their dwellings, off-site or on-site. There were **78.7%** households with flush toilets and **93.4%** of the households had access to electricity supply. A total of **72.2%** households had their refuse removed once per week.

Where service delivery is lagging, we will be quick to intervene. Help to improve waste collection, management and recycling will be provided.

Partnerships with the waste management sector will be enhanced to explore opportunities and device solutions to enhance our environment.

Ways to increase our share of the waste economy and the support of waste pickers will also be prioritised.

We will improve the capacity of municipalities to spend their **Municipal Infrastructure Grants** to improve service delivery to communities.

The **Eskom debt relief programme** to **Nala, Masilonyana, Matjhabeng, Maluti-a-Phofung, Dihlabeng, Nketoana, Ngwathe, Moqhaka, Phumelela** and **Tswelopele Local Municipalities** is a welcomed move.

We will be with these municipalities every step of the way to ensure that they adhere to the conditions of their electricity debt relief programme.

Importantly, we will see to the implementation of the **Distribution Agency Agreement** between **Eskom** and **Maluti-a-Phofung Local**



Municipality to restore this municipality's ability to pay-off its electricity debt.

Work has begun in this regard. We have established a **Project Management Office** to oversee the implementation of this **Agreement** in **Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality**.

Honourable Speaker

Communication, accountability and responsiveness are fundamental ingredients of a strong relationship between government and the people.

Make no mistake, we will rise to this expectation and listen to the people.

So, know that we are taking urgent action. We owe it to the people.

Constant communication about their service delivery needs is crucial.

That is why moving forward, we will implement a technologically advanced **Integrated Complaint Management System** and establish an **Inter-departmental Service Delivery Rapid Response Management Team**.

Involvement of communities in municipal planning processes will be enhanced and political oversight amplified for improved service delivery.



Management of **CDWs** will be enhanced to help bridge any possible service delivery gap in communities. We will build partnerships with municipalities to accommodate **CDWs** and agree on reporting mechanisms that will ensure they best serve our communities.

We will review and update the **Indigent Registers** of municipalities.

To those who do not qualify to receive free basic services, be warned. We shall not hesitate to recoup monies and remove you from the **Register**.

Climate change is a reality. Raging fires, intense heat waves, extreme droughts, severe storms and heavy floods are but examples of this.

Our collective efforts to deal with these challenges will include the implementation of the **Free State Climate Change Adaptation and Implementation Strategy**.

Municipalities will be supported with climate change response strategies, and ways to access green and climate finance from international donors.

We will also enhance our disaster preparedness and management by creating functional **Disaster Management Centres** in districts and metro.

For a better future, we will invest in climate resilient infrastructure, and leverage technology to understand and enhance our responses.



Conclusion

Honourable Speaker

Thirty years have passed since the attainment of our democracy. And these are no ordinary times. Expectations are high for the **7th Administration** to deliver. We have been entrusted with the future success of the **Free State**.

What lies ahead of us is not about me or you, but the people. No one understands the scale of this responsibility better than all of us here.

We need to serve their interests and turn their dreams into lived realities.

And for this to happen, we need to grow the economy, create jobs, reduce poverty, and build a capable state. Surely this is not asking for too much.

We cannot stress enough the urgency needed to deal with the challenges that confront us. There are no easy answers to these challenges.

But there are no limits to what we can achieve when we work together. It is possible. And political will and determination have never been stronger.

We will traverse the path of development in pursuit of a better life for all. I know we share the same optimism for a better future.



Let us make it happen. Our journey will not be easy. Change is hard. There will be twists and turns. But we will not despair.

If along the way we need to alter our course, so be it.

This is the time to deliver. And as we do so, we will leave no one behind.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my family for the continued support, my organisation the **ANC** and its **Leagues, Alliance Partners**, friends, and leaders from other provinces.

Thank you!