

Speaker of the Free State Legislature, Mxolisi Dukwana

The Chair of Chairs, Thabo Meeko

Our Acting Secretary, Steven Mabalane

The technical specialists who have assisted us to navigate these critical three days

The Executive Management of the Free State Legislature and the support staff that made part of this Strategic session.

Today, we begin a new era within the Free State Legislature. The past two days culminate into our commitment as a team, willing and ready to pave a new way forward for this institution. This Strategic session is important to the Presiding Officers collectively as it speaks directly to the renewal and rebuilding commitment that the majority party in this country upholds.

I am moved to agree with Comrade O.R. Tambo on the occasion of the Morogoro Conference in 1969 when he said: "No one in the movement can be content with the present situation, all must be aware of the deepening malaise such as we have known before." What we knew as the Free State Legislature before, has reached its finale and we are all here to witness the turning of a new page.

The compilation of this critical document charts a new path for the next five years and beyond. It is important that we do not see this as a 5-year term document but as a legacy-building era. Our work, in these three days should formulate an organization that we would be proud to hand over to those who will come after us and this should be reflected both internally and in the services provided to the people of the Free State. Speaker, there are areas of concern that Presiding Officers have touched on in various occasions including when you opened this meeting on Wednesday. As I reflect on them, I hope that colleagues would fathom that we are now moving to turn them into a much clearer strategic direction of our institution.

Our Chief Financial Officer speaks with concern when he highlights the financial distress we are in because of the 21% budget cut that was instituted on us by the Provincial Treasury. Speaker, you reflected on this within your Budget Vote and though we have written to the MEC for Finance concerning this matter, I think we need to make a firm commitment as Presiding Officers to strengthen engagements with the Treasury Department. This should be a continuous process that should not only restore the resources we are in dire need of; but moreover; advocate for an educational relationship that will ensure that the core business of the Legislature is restored and thrives.

In the same breath, we are a public institution that should take pride in the growth and development of this Province. CFO, we need to be deliberate in the empowerment of Women and Young people within the Free State. It is important that in the next six (6) months, we do an open invite for service providers to be part of our database. Let it be that the record shows that we brought a clearer; more deliberate understanding to our people that the Legislature is a place where one can also grow their SMME.

When we began the planning of this session, we were intentional in inviting and working with technical specialists who possess a unique understanding of the Legislative Sector. I want to use this opportunity to appreciate some of the valuable inputs made by some of our strategic partners over the past three days.

I want to accede to the fact that our institution is challenged because we do not have systems and processes; systems that inform our decision-making and resources and we should all agree that this must be corrected. Mme Tshabalala's presentation shared the same sentiments and this is why the Organizational Development Process should be prioritized with urgency.

Speaker, my reflections and perhaps coined as directives concerning our institution start with our internal staff. The Moratorium on Human Capital instituted by the Presiding Officers earlier this year emanated from a number of concerns that we believed this Strategic session would give direction on.

As a point of departure, I am fully convinced that it is important that Human Resources begins a process of ensuring that every staff member goes back to the original position that they were initially appointed for. We should be able to fully utilize our manpower for reasons they were appointed for and develop them in the same roles. This move will enable us to then receive a true reflection of our human capital needs and chart a clearer way forward.

In the planning phase of this session, we requested a number of documents from different directorates. Amongst those was a report received from a Service Provider that was requested to conduct a Mental Wellness in the Workplace Workshop earlier this year. This document should be a guiding light for us to have Team Building Sessions, not only for senior management but for the entire staff regimen of the Legislature. I have equally directed the Office to start working with HR on planning Leadership Workshops for Executive Management. We need to know how to lead in the Directorates we are positioned in as well as work well with our subordinates.

I lead this institution with men who believe that issues of Gender-Based Violence should receive attention far and wide. Ntate Ndakana, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is fast approaching and I believe that this should be our first major interaction with our stakeholders. (I am hoping CFO is listening as I say this to Ntate Ndakana, so he can direct some little cents into this programme). Families are losing loved ones, young and old and we need to be a leading voice in saying more needs to be done for both our girl child but equally our boy child. Our job should also extend to affording our people an opportunity to understand what Bills and Acts say on this matter.

Ntate Ndakana, our relationship with the IEC should not only be important when it is election season. It should be prioritized at all times and should find space in the minds of the young and old both. This principle doesn't only apply to the IEC but fostering strategic relationships should be a matter that we lead purposefully and deliberately. These stakeholders will make our institution greater and better in the next five years.

In the next 6 months, we will have regular interactions that should shape our planning process. This systematic thinking should influence amongst others;

1. Inter-Governmental Relations – We should never find ourselves receiving travel documents 2 days before departure when Honourable members embark on International trips. These CPA engagements are important for the overall growth of political leaders and they should receive the dignity they deserve
2. The Development of the Institutional Calendar of Events and Activities – in the archives of this institution lies the understanding of activities such as the Opening of the Legislature as well as Budget Votes. But we need to develop a proper yearly calendar that guides both our planning and implementation. Colleagues, our lack of planning, affects the Procurement planning process that hinges on Supply Chain Management. This critical matter applies to all Directorates. Let it be engraved in our minds that the Auditor General will fault us continuously if we do not get our house in order. We need to do better.
3. Communications and Marketing: The compilation of the Communications Strategy of the Free State Legislature is another important matter that deserves to be attended to. Our branding material speaks of “An activist Legislature that Champions Democracy” It is time that we fully develop this into an actionable Strategy that will carry our messages loudly on different platforms
4. The strengthening of the Legislative Sector: This aspect is critical as it feeds directly to who and what the Legislature is directed to action. Ntate Mabalane, the work of the Legislature rests on the shoulders of Committee work. Let us direct efforts into both capacitating it but also ensuring that it functions optimally.
5. Speaker; in our Presiding Officers meeting; you have spoken about the need to have our policies reviewed as their relevance; especially to our internal staff should be explored. It is important we begin an internal process of doing a review and putting together a report with clear recommendations for the Executive Authority. This should also come with recommendations of new policies. I want to believe Colleagues that if we took unpopular decisions to have new policies such as the In-service training/ Internship Policies; we would change the lives of many young South Africans.

As a Legislature; we are charged with an oversight and accountability mandate. But we cannot enforce this mandate on others when we cannot exercise it ourselves first. We are not only accountable for this institution but we are walking; breathing billboards of the Legislature. We teach; we empower but we must also be accountable. Both with our resources and with ourselves. As we navigate our way forward; it is important that we do it in unison .

Lastly, let me take this opportunity to thank Ntate Mabalane and the team for ensuring that this process begins. In this new beginning lies the hope that we are able to do more; together. Let me use this moment to also thank the Presiding Officers for ensuring that they lead this mammoth task with the diligence it deserves.

Colleagues, we are present to the changes that the Free State Legislature is currently undergoing. We are Present to the transformative engine that is roaring within our institution. We have an opportunity to own this moment and direct it to our advantage. Let us fully own this moment and use it beneficially for our people.

I thank You.