

28 Feb 2023

State of the Province Address, University of the Free State South Campus, Bloemfontein, Premier of the Free State, MA Dukwana

Honourable Speaker of the Legislature;
Honourable Members of the Legislature and the Executive Council Honourable Members of the National Assembly and the NCOP Former Premier Beatrice Marshoff;
Former Premier Sefora Ntombela;
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

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for the rare opportunity I have been granted to lead the Free State province as the Premier.

Let me reiterate what I said on the occasion of my inauguration - that I do not take lightly the responsibility that you have bestowed upon me to serve our people with a great degree of respect, integrity and devotion. I also wish to heartily thank my predecessor, Mme Sefora Ntombela, for having steered the ship since 2018. We are eternally grateful for your great service to the people of our province.

Let me welcome Mme Paleho Celestina Makibitla – a 90-year-old lady whom government recently built a house. Mme Makibitla made a request to government to build her a home during the 2021 Local Government Elections campaign. She joins many who have benefited from our national housing scheme to restore the dignity of our people.

We are also joined by Reitumetse Thakalekoala, Tihonolofatso Gaonwe, Orefile Mojatau, Mmonemang Mraushe and Katleho Moeketsi who will be travelling to Columbia to compete at a youth development program called Miss Pure Sparkle International Beauty Pageant. We wish you well as you embark on this journey.

We also take this opportunity to salute the Proteas Women's National Team for reaching the T20 Cricket World Cup final. Today, as we did before, we have claimed our rightful space on the table of equals and this shall be recorded in the annals of history.

We are also proud to have in our midst, Mme Motlagomang Thato Mothamane, a police officer from Seloseshu police station. This young lady made our province proud for winning the Laureate Award at the South African Police Service National Excellence.

We deliver this State of the Province Address under tremendous pressure given the challenges that beset our province. Some of these challenges are historic, flowing from our colonial and apartheid past. Others are due to our subjective and objective failures as government.

Recently, our people began a penetrating dialogue with government about the quality of service delivery. They conveyed their discomfort with the overall pace of transformation.

To address this, we call on our people to become agents of change and put their energies at the disposal of communities. We urge them to support our efforts to combat corruption, malfeasance and maladministration.

Today marks the beginning of the end of such an era. The period ahead will be characterised by courage and decisive action to set the Free State on a new path of development. This will involve a focused recruitment of capable public servants to transform our ideals into pragmatic actions.

In the next fourteen months, we shall take decisive action to make the Free State a province of choice. We will leverage on our location at the heart of South Africa, a reality upon which our development must be based.

Our single biggest task is to ensure that our people live in quality houses, their children play and learn in safe environments, our healthcare provides quality services and every person has equal access to opportunities.

This marks the final year of this Executive Council's administration in government. This year will therefore not be the same. We need a renewed sense of drive and purpose. We need to focus on things that unite us and not divide us and to realise our strengths and endless possibilities.

For us to achieve these, we need to do what Thomas Sankara once directed: "... you cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain degree of madness. In this case, it comes from non-conformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas and the courage to invent the future..."

Economic Transformation and Job Creation

Honourable Speaker

The past few years have challenged the Free State on multiple levels. We have witnessed the impact of Covid-19 and the resultant economic slowdown, high unemployment rate, persistent poverty and the escalating cost of living.

To deal with these challenges, we have embarked on a decisive path of recovery. The Free State official unemployment rate declined from 38.1% in the third quarter of 2021 to 33.8% in the third quarter of 2022.

We have developed eleven economic sector Master Plans and we are now reviewing the Free State Growth and Development Strategy. This will deepen our initiatives to create an enabling environment for inclusive growth, investment attraction, economic transformation and job creation.

We have created 50 082 job opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme across the three spheres of government, thereby exceeding our 2 022 commitment. Of this number, the Community Works Programme contributed 26 871 job opportunities.

The composition of the participants of these job opportunities is aligned to our stated priorities of designated groups as 36 839 beneficiaries were women whilst 17 197 were youth and 407 were persons with disabilities.

One of the key drivers of economic growth and job creation is our Small and Medium Enterprises. In the current financial year, 869 enterprises were provided with financial and non-financial support of which 472 were youth-owned.

The Free State Development Corporation provided financial support to 24 Small and Medium Enterprises, including 8 youth-owned Contractor Development Programme businesses.

We will undertake a substantial review of the current state of our public entities and reposition them to be proactive and responsive to the investment and development needs of the Free State economy.

The revitalisation of our Industrial Parks is another key enabler of provincial economic growth. Our priority areas remain Botshabelo, Phuthaditjhaba and Thaba Nchu. This Programme is catalytic to unlock job creation as 3 986 people are now employed in these Industrial Parks.

The Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone continues to offer multiple investment opportunities. Right now, the Special Economic Zone has a pipeline of 12 investors worth over R2 billion.

Over the next few months, we anticipate to conclude new agreements with private sector investments in the cement and concrete, textile and dry-powder food manufacturing sectors. These three investments will add 437 jobs to the 127 people already employed at the Special Economic Zone.

Honourable Speaker

The Legislature is currently considering two key pieces of legislation, namely the Free State Integrated Local Economic Development and Transformation Bill and the Free State Gambling, Liquor, Tourism Authority Amendment Bill that will advance the economic transformation and growth trajectory of the Free State.

The Free State tourism sector holds the potential to create jobs, stimulate growth and drive investment. We will increase our tourism market share through destination marketing, product development and promotion.

The Free State has always prided itself on its agricultural sector and its contribution to the provincial economic activity. The sector, comprises of 4 500 commercial agricultural entities and employed in excess of 73 000 workers in 2 021, is a critical driver of job creation. There are new emerging opportunities in deciduous fruit production that will be explored in the Eastern Free State.

A thriving agricultural sector is dependent on the safety and security of farmers and farm workers as well as the security of tenure of farm workers.

A brief reflection on the crime statistics for the period April to December 2022 compared to the same period in 2021 show that the Free State contributed 12 cases out of the 38 national number of cases reported in respect of stock theft and incidents on farms.

Notwithstanding the reported reduction of 4.8% in respect of stock theft when compared to the same period in the previous year, this category of crime must remain a particular focus area as we intensify our cooperation with all stakeholders to improve the safety and security in our rural areas.

A number of farm workers are in employment of an unspecified duration and remains the most vulnerable to illegal or constructive evictions.

We will continue to actively support the various established mechanisms to deal with farm evictions, particularly the timely resolution of disputes to mitigate against the human rights abuse and unjust socio-economic consequences of illegal evictions.

In June 2022, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development reported that from inception of the tenure acquisition programme to March 2022, 139 farms were acquired in the Free State.

The audit of unused and under-utilized land owned by the provincial government must be finalised to enable the provincial government to make land available for redistribution.

Whilst continuing our support of commercial farmers, our Rekgaba ka Diratswana Food Security Programme benefited more than 700 households in the past year. These households were supported with various agricultural essentials meant to eradicate food insecurity.

This Programme will be supplemented by a new concept, the Production Brigade we are exploring with the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans and the South African National Defence Force. The Programme will focus on agricultural products such as green produce, red and white meat, and full value chain of opportunities related to agri- produce.

The opportunities for youth in agriculture during the current financial year included some of the following:

- Employment of 510 unemployed graduates who now provide farming extension services.
- 222 green job opportunities, focusing on the eradication of invader and alien species was created through the Agriculture Land Care Programme. This benefited 97 women and 105 youth.
- R55 million supported various youth development programmes, including various on- and off-farm activities.

Honourable Speaker

The growth and prosperity of the Free State is dependent on the quality of our infrastructure. Whilst some progress has been made with the expansion and upgrading of infrastructure, we have not consistently kept up with the required maintenance.

It is time for a fundamental and comprehensive rethink of the way in which we plan and implement our infrastructure investments.

We have initiated a process that will ensure that we create a fair, competitive and transparent process at every stage to maximise the value we gain from infrastructure investment whilst closing out the internal and external syndicates that have bedevilled the infrastructure environment.

Within this re-conceptualisation, we will equally ensure that the set- asides for women, youth and persons with disabilities are implemented.

We are pleased with the 25 major infrastructure projects with an estimated value of over R138 billion that have been registered with Infrastructure South Africa. These projects are in the human settlements, energy, water and sanitation, transport and social infrastructure sectors.

Two of the Strategic Integrated Projects in the transport sector, namely the upgrade of the national route from Ventersburg to Kroonstad and the upgrade of the Winburg Interchange have been completed.

The Vista Park II and III project, which will yield 4 500 housing opportunities, is under construction.

Other projects include the Maluti-a-Phofung Alternative Energy Solution to construct solar plants in Qwaqwa and Tshiame, and the Electricity Upgrade and Remedial Work to improve the network. Both of these projects are currently in the pre-feasibility stage.

When complete, the Mangaung Airport Development Node project valued at over R10 billion will provide residential units, retail areas, conference facilities, office space and a hotel. The project is now at feasibility stage.

There is the Sasolburg Integrated and Mixed Housing Development project valued at over R8 billion. This project will integrate Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark as part of the envisaged Vaal River City Region between the two towns. This project is in the structuring and design stage.

- The multibillion rands Virginia Gas project by Renergen is beginning to change our economic fortunes. A feasibility study will be undertaken for the creation of a Special Economic Zone to maximize beneficiation from the gas extraction and related industries in the Virginia area.

The Thaba 'Nchu Smelter, currently under construction, will change the economic landscape of this area. This project, with an estimated value of R300 million, will create 2 000 permanent jobs when completed around the first quarter of the new financial year.

The conclusion of a Memorandum of Agreement with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) continues to enhance our project planning, management and implementation capacity. The partnership with the DBSA has resulted in the increased infrastructure coordination capacity in the Office of the Premier.

The DESTEA is supported with the renovation of the Philip Sanders and Sterkfontein resorts. The Department of Human Settlements has concluded an agreement with DBSA for the eradication of inappropriate structures.

Honourable Speaker

We have developed a Social Compact that provides for a shared commitment between government and the people of the Free State.

Consultation processes; using a combination of the District Development Model approach and sector-specific consultations will be used to finalise the Social Compact. Our sector-specific consultations will include an Investment and Infrastructure Conference, a Mining Indaba and a Creative Sector Convention during the course of this year.

The ravages of climate change, leave no doubt that sustainability, conservation and efficiency are pathways to the future. We continue to work with the International Labour Organisation, to determine opportunities and challenges to address climate change.

We have established an Energy Security Command Centre coordinated by the COGTA and all relevant stakeholders such as Eskom, MISA, Department of Water and Sanitation, and national and provincial departments. The Command Centre will coordinate and implement the provincial response plan on the energy security. This includes the provision of generators to hospitals by the Department of Health.

We are part of the Integrated Resource Efficiency Programme to reduce electricity and water consumption through various measures at government buildings and schools.

Honourable Speaker

The Free State is blessed with natural resources that include gold, diamonds, salt and sand, with a huge potential to transform our economy. Recent discoveries of natural gas serve as motivation for us to collaborate with the Council on Geoscience to remap provincial natural resources.

The ongoing work with the Department of Mineral Resources to support small-scale miners will continue. The award of mining permits to artisanal miners will be pursued. This intervention will help to curb illegal mining activities, and will usher in a new dawn in this industry in the province.

The deteriorating state of our road infrastructure, is a stumbling block for economic development. Whilst we will spend approximately R1.9 billion on upgrading and maintaining our road infrastructure this year, it is imperative that we change the ways and means in which road service delivery happens. International best practices have shown that road construction can happen in a more efficient and effective manner. The Free State provincial government will be exploring the implementation of solutions such as 24-hour road construction.

We must give particular attention to expedite the maintenance and construction backlog of our roads that form the backbone of logistics industry and support economic activity such as the roads in the Ficksburg and Bothaville area. Work in this regard has already commenced with an allocation of R1 billion for the prioritization of the following roads:

- Ladybrand – Bethlehem (R26 road)
- Ficksburg - Rosendal (R70 road)

We must find innovative ways to shorten the time-frames, find resourcing solutions and improve the efficiency of our service delivery.

Our investment in roads infrastructure in the next financial year, will comprise of:

- R771 million in Thabo Mofutsanyana
- R220 million in Fezile Dabi
- R217 million in Xhariep
- R165 million in Mangaung
- R125 million in Lejweleputswa

During the current financial year, the Township Revitalization Programme focused on the upgrading of gravel to paved roads and created 400 jobs. The focus has been on township roads in 14 townships.

Nine of these projects will be completed at the end of March and the remaining roads will be completed at the end of May.

This Programme is shifting to the Department of Community Safety, Roads and Transport in the new financial year. The next phase of the Programme will focus on township roads in QwaQwa, Bethlehem, Bloemfontein, Botshabelo, Thaba Nchu, Sasolburg, Kroonstad Ficksburg, Harrismith, Ladybrand and Paul Roux.

Current projects include: Tweeling to Frankfort, Reitz to Tweeling, Dewetsdorp to Bloemfontein, Luckhoff to Havenga, Tweespruit access road and the R30 Allanridge. These projects are being closely monitored for successful completion.

An amount of R255 million is available for the completion of these projects. A specific intervention will be implemented to deal with all delayed and stalled road infrastructure projects.

An amount of R150 million is budgeted for the re-gravelling programme in all five districts.

We are enhancing our Operation Vala Zonke initiatives to eradicate potholes. Our focus must be multi-pronged, include the private sector and the rebuilding of capacity within the public sector.

We will draw on the capacity developed through various Contractor Development Programmes to accelerate the expansion of the repair of potholes in our municipal spaces. Municipalities will be required to develop, fund and implement pothole eradication programmes.

Social Protection, Human Development and Safe Communities

Honourable Speaker

Our social protection programmes are a reflection of a caring government. Our social safety net is a conduit to economic inclusion, poverty alleviation, but most importantly, improved quality of life.

Of the 2.9 million population of the Free State, one million people are receiving social grants. Most beneficiaries are recipients of child support grants followed by the elderly and persons living with disabilities.

Community Nutrition Development Centres are committed to ensure access to safe and nutritious food. We will continue to provide access to food and developmental programmes to 7 406 poor and vulnerable persons who benefit on a daily basis from our 55 Centres in the province.

Three of these centres were established in collaboration with traditional leadership.

Last year we committed to retain 92 Social Work Graduate interns who were appointed as part of Covid-19 interventions. These interns have been appointed on a 3-year contract to execute social work services.

This year, we are also able to accommodate the remaining 63 Social Work Graduates who were beneficiaries of government's bursary programme. Twenty-five of them will be accommodated in the Department of Education and 38 in the Department of Social Development on the same basis as the previous cohort.

Nothing will ever justify violence against women and children. We will escalate the fight against patriarchal practices, norms, beliefs and values that dehumanise women.

Our criminal justice system has illustrated its intent to deal decisively with the perpetrators of gender-based violence. Successful convictions and imprisonments include 18 cases where life sentences were imposed and 13 cases which resulted in imprisonment of 20 years and longer.

We are on course to implement the Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan.

Psycho-social support is provided through our Thuthuzela Care Centres, Safe Houses, Shelters and Victim Friendly Centres. In August last year, a newly built Gender-Based Violence Centre was launched in QwaQwa and is now operational.

This year, we will open a Safe House in Botshabelo and a Gender- Based and Femicide Shelter in Xhariep.

Honourable Speaker

The Early Childhood Development function now resides under the Department of Education and continues to promote school readiness of children. 1 443 ECD sites are funded by the Department of Education.

Our education achievements remain impressive. We take pride in our number one position as the leading province in the country with an 88.5% Grade 12 pass rate.

We have maintained a Grade 12 pass rate above 80% from 2019. We are also the top performer in a number of subjects, including Accounting, Business Studies, Geography, Economics and History. We are confident that we will maintain this position!

We must express our appreciation to the broader education family. Our success is rooted in the collective effort of our educators, learners, parents, SGBs, unions, the private sector and NGOs.

These outcomes are supported by the School Nutrition Programme that enhances learning and teaching in schools. The proportion of learners who benefited from this programme increased from 51.4% in 2009 to 84.2% in 2021 and will be extended to 600 176 learners this year. The Presidential Youth Employment Initiative has made a substantial impact on youth unemployment. Phases 2 and 3 of the Programme resulted in 15 309 youth being placed in the Department. Phase 4 of the project will accommodate 15 500 youth.

Of these, 6 200 had already started in February 2023 and the remaining nine thousand, three hundred will commence on the 1st of May 2023. This programme has helped us to reclaim curriculum losses and to address the infrastructure challenges of our schools, including the maintenance of school grounds. Learners with barriers are also supported.

We are continuing to expand our 4th Industrial Revolution Programmes in schools to meet the challenges of the future. The Department is committed to support 4 791 Grade 8 and 3 632 Grade 9 learners in equipping them with Coding and Robotics skills.

The 23 secondary schools that offer Coding and Robotics will be supported to become fully equipped Coding and Robotics schools in the future.

We continue to place high value on the delivery of quality education infrastructure. During the past year, we have completed the reconstruction of the 30 schools that formed part of the ASIDI-programme. (Accelerated School Infrastructure Development Initiative). These schools were built with inappropriate material prior to 1994.

Eleven new schools are currently under construction in the province:

- Trompsburg Special School in Xhariep
- Tlholo Primary School in Motheo
- Arbeidsgenot Primary School in Motheo
- Matlafalang Primary School in Motheo
- Tshehetso Primary School in Lejweleputswa
- Malebogo Primary School in Lejweleputswa
- Morena Tshohisi Primary School in Thabo Mofutsanyana
- Vogelfontein Primary School in Thabo Mofutsanyana
- DR Sello Primary School in Fezile Dabi
- Katlego Mpumelelo Primary School in Fezile Dabi
- Father Balink Primary School in Fezile Dabi

Construction of two new schools, Bergman Primary School in Motheo and Tsebo Ulwazi Secondary School in Fezile Dabi, will commence this year. Dr. Blok Secondary School in Motheo will also be reconstructed.

Through the farm school initiative, the construction of a new girls' hostel at Dr. Block Secondary School was completed. Two hostels at Leboneng Special School in Lejweleputswa and Breda Primary School are now under construction.

Prioritising school safety will require a collaboration between the SAPS with designated patrols to schools, school management, SGBs and school safety committees. Schools must be weapon-free and drug-free.

Our commitment to increase investment in training and skills development is evident in our Bursary Programme. Every year, we award bursaries to the Top 100 Grade 12 learners in the province to study at local universities.

From 2009 to 2022, 1 225 international and 10 988 local bursaries were awarded to young people.

Our work with the SETAs have led to the provision of 4 389 internship, learnership and apprenticeship opportunities for young people since 2019.

We will convene a provincial Skills Development Conference with all the SETAs during August to enhance our initiatives to maximize our skills development programmes.

We continue to collaborate with the Central University of Technology, the University of the Free State and Motheo TVET College on various Medium Terms Strategic Framework priorities.

Honourable Speaker

The provision of safe human settlements is not only about providing dignified shelter to our people but it speaks directly to the restoration of their dignity, sustainable livelihood, and security of tenure. Our main priorities for the year include the following:

- Completing the 11 000 incomplete houses and resolving the blocked projects in partnership with the National Home Builders Registration Council.
- Accelerating integrated housing through the revival of the Phakisa Mega and the QwaQwa Gateway projects and completing the Vista Park Presidential project
- Intensifying social facilitation within our informal settlements. We are pleased to announce that progress has been made with the long- outstanding land transfer for the resettlement of the Phambili community near Jacobsdal.
- Embarking on Alternative Building Technologies within our settlements that were identified as emergency areas
- Unblocking the challenges relating to the FLISP-programme

We have embarked on a process to acquire inner city properties in major urban centers to provide affordable rental housing. This process entails the acquisition of vacant land, dilapidated buildings, and existing buildings in the inner-cities for repurposing. This will advance our spatial transformation agenda.

We are working with the Development Bank of Southern Africa as an implementing agent for the removal and replacement of asbestos roofing in about 36 000 houses across the province.

Another priority remains the upgrading of the registered 166 informal settlements. The improvement package includes the provision of basic services, access to amenities and security of tenure.

A campaign to accelerate the issuing of title deeds will commence next month to ensure the security of tenure for home owners.

Our people have suffered the indignity of the bucket system for far too long. The state of sanitation in many of our towns requires us to put in place urgent intervention measures.

A progress report compiled in August 2022, revealed that there were over 10 000 unconnected toilets in areas such as Clocolan, Ficksburg, Senekal, Reitz, Petrus Steyn, Arlington and Dealesville. This year, we will spare no effort in ensuring that these toilets are fully functional. This project will, over time, be rolled out to other towns across the province.

Re kgutlisa seriti sa batho ba habo rona.

We will direct the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality to address

sanitation challenges, particularly in Botshabelo.

Government has equally prioritized dysfunctional waste water treatment plants. Work has already commenced at the waste water treatment plant in Matjhabeng and will soon commence in Maluti-a-Phofung.

Our prosperity is dependent on the provision and quality of our healthcare facilities and services. There will be renewed focus to strengthen our primary health care facilities and services, including specifically pre- and ante-natal care. This will be achieved through;

- Reducing queues at Primary Healthcare facilities through the use of alternative chronic medication distribution channels.
- Increasing the immunisation coverage for children between 6 months and 15 years.
- Expanding the roll-out of session doctors at Primary Health Care facilities.
- Outreach by District Health Services to Primary Health Care facilities. This re-engineering of healthcare service delivery will result in doctors from district level attending to clinics
- The refurbishment and expansion of clinic infrastructure for the implementation of the National Health Insurance
- Resourcing clinics with human capital, equipment, medicine and consumables.

There are currently 3 facilities that operate on a 24-hour basis, namely Mangaung University Community Partnership Project in Bloemfontein, PAX in Viljoenskroon and the Winnie Mandela clinic in Botshabelo. It is envisaged that the new Community Health Centre to be constructed in Heidedal will also operate on a 24-hour basis.

The remainder of our clinics operate on an extended 12-hour basis. We will conclude an efficiency review of these extended hours within the next three months. This will inform further expansion of our 24-hour facilities. We continue to invest in the human capital available in the health sector. In the last year, we increased our capacity with various clinical appointments, including 22 Medical Officers, 512 Professional Nurses, 24 Pharmacists and 12 Social Workers.

The 2003 Community Healthcare Workers contracted as part of the Covid-19 response, have been retained to provide integrated community healthcare.

We are rolling out a Patient Information System to improve patient care, revenue generation and mitigate against medico-legal exposure. The digitization of patient records which is currently being implemented at the National District Hospital, will be extended to ten other hospitals in the 2023/24 financial year. Hundred and fifty young unemployed ICT graduates will be recruited to implement the digitization of patient records.

Our investment in health infrastructure includes the refurbishment of the following facilities:

- Bongani Hospital Nursing School Campus
- Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli Nursing School
- Free State School of Nursing Campus at Bongani Regional Hospital
- Albert Nzula Orthopaedics and Thusanong (maternity scissors operations) District Hospitals Theatres
- Maternity Ward at Pelonomi Tertiary Hospital

Seven healthcare projects were completed in the current financial year, namely:

- Mafube Hospital upgrade
- Ophthalmology and optometry unit at the National District Hospital
- Doctors Accommodation at Botshabelo Hospital
- Bophelong Clinic refurbishment
- Seadimo Clinic upgrade
- Boitumelo Clinic refurbishment
- Winburg Hospital new boiler

The following new projects will start in the 2023/24 financial year:

- Dihlabeng Regional Hospital smart revitalization in Bethlehem
- Construction of New Dinaane Clinic in Thaba Nchu
- Construction of new Vaalrock Clinic in Winnie Mandela
- Construction of new Bophelong Clinic in Kroonstad
- Upgrade of JD Newberry Hospital in Clocolan
- Upgrade of Lesedi Clinic in Harrismith
- New Gariepdam Clinic in Gariiep Honourable Speaker

Beyond bridging our racial divide, our social cohesion programmes are intended to foster unity in diversity. They form the basis for a life more fulfilling, a life more inclusive, and a life worth living.

The racist attack of Kgokong Nakedi and Brian Nakedi Jnr at the Maselspoort Resort on the 25th of December last year is a reminder that some of us are still frozen in time and prisoners of our past. We condemn this abhorrent incident. Perpetrators of these acts must be reminded that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and racism will not be tolerated.

The arts, culture, heritage, sport and recreation landscape of the Free State offers endless possibilities for the individual and collective pursuit of talent and passion. We need to create an enabling environment within which our programmes find expression.

Processes are advanced to establish a provincial Film Commission this year as part of the efforts to create a thriving creative industry. We must leverage off this opportunity to develop the value chain of this sector, particularly the technical and related industries.

The 2022 Mangaung African Cultural Festival continued to provide an opportunity for 145 local artists to participate in the Homebrew Development Programme. We will reimagine this Festival to drive culture, arts, heritage and economic growth with a focus on local artists. This will include revisiting the funding model to ensure its self-sustenance.

We will convene the Creative Industry Convention to explore economic opportunities presented by this sector by creating a unique homebrewed talent. We will unleash the talent and entrepreneurial potential of our artists and link talent with opportunities. Our focus will be on the whole spectrum of this industry that includes the performing arts, visual arts, crafts and skills development.

Our support to the sport and recreation sector continued to find expression in various programmes, including the Ba2Cada Soccer Tournament, Kasi World Cup, Mangaung Unite Football Club, Sports Councils and Boxing Tournament.

We applaud the Department of Education's introduction of Magnificent Wednesdays which has resulted in the revival of school sports. The Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation supported the school sport initiative through sport equipment and attire to 75 schools.

Our investment in sport infrastructure will manifest in the continued construction of Indoor Sport Centres in Kroonstad, Smithfield and Frankfort.

Honourable Speaker

The Free State crime statistics for the period April 2022 to December 2022 when compared to the same period in 2021/2022 shows an increase. This is ascribed to the lifting of the lockdown confinement measures that were in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Illicit mining and damage to critical infrastructure remain a concern in the province. From July 2022 to January 2023, a dedicated team dealt specifically with illicit mining and a total number of 5 260 arrests were made. We encourage the Department of Home Affairs, the SAPS and other stakeholders to escalate the implementation of a programme focusing on undocumented foreign nationals.

Of concern is the fact that drug-related arrests in the Free State increased by 41.8% when compared with the same period in the previous year.

These statistics motivate us to prioritize the finalization of the Provincial Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy.

We commend the SAPS for the work that they are doing; often in very challenging circumstances. Community Policing Forums will be strengthened to work with the SAPS to combat crime in our communities.

We have experienced the painful truth that fraud and corruption are not victimless crimes. The financial management and performance information audit outcomes of the Free State provincial and local government sector, clearly indicate our shortcomings in compliance with good governance principles, systems and processes. Our human resource capacity falls short of expectations and requirements.

We will establish a new Fraud and Corruption Task Team that will bring together key stakeholders such as the Office of the Auditor-General, Public Protector, the Public Service Commission, the criminal justice system and key provincial departments such as the Office of the Premier, Provincial Treasury and COGTA to drive the anti-corruption programme of government.

We have noted that various investigations across provincial departments were ongoing at the conclusion of the previous PFMA audit cycle. These investigations must be brought to finalization and recommendations be implemented.

Forensic investigations will be commissioned into various human settlements projects, including G-Hostel, Silver and Dark City as well as the Caleb Motshabi development in Mangaung.

The provincial government prioritized the implementation of lifestyle audits in accordance with the appropriate regulatory framework. We are, however, not satisfied with our progress and will secure external assistance to accelerate the implementation of lifestyle audits.

In addition, an immediate review of the vetting status of officials dealing with procurement will be conducted. Officials who deal with these functions must be in possession of valid security clearance.

All public officials, whether they are elected representatives or public servants at all levels of government, will be required to cooperate fully and support the work of law enforcement agencies. We will issue a clear directive on matters relating to the arrest of public officials, including the payment of legal fees, suspension and disciplinary proceedings.

A Plan of Action to implement the recommendations of the Zondo Commission has been developed and submitted to The Presidency. We will implement this Plan relating to various matters in the Free State.

It is imperative that we restore the integrity and credibility of our government. Never again will this province be used as the breeding ground for corruption.

Governance, State Capacity and Institutional Development
Honourable Speaker

A capable, ethical and developmental state is important for us to create an effective, transparent and accountable public service. It has become abundantly clear that there is an urgent need to conduct skills audits throughout the provincial and local government sector. We must ensure that the skills set, qualifications, experience and competencies of all public officials are aligned with the needs and requirements of the public sector.

An intensive skills audit and realignment process will therefore unfold.

We must direct our focus to the basic service delivery imperatives – reliable and clean water supply, proper and decent sanitation services, regular refuse removal, decent roads as well as the creation of an enabling environment for job creation. A sense of urgency must be instilled in our local government sector to attend to these imperatives.

We must maximize the benefits inherent to the MIG in terms of both infrastructure improvements and job creation. MIG spending in the past year enabled the creation of 1 839 temporary jobs of which 553 were women beneficiaries. Municipalities will be required to ensure that 10% of MIG expenditure is allocated to maintenance of infrastructure.

Municipalities will be supported by COGTA and DESTEA to ensure that municipal landfill sites are compliant and licensed.

Where such facilities do not exist, municipalities will be supported to apply for MIG in order to develop such infrastructure on an urgent basis. We call on our communities to reduce littering and keep their environment clean.

The professionalization of the local sphere of government is a continuous process. We will intensify our approach to ensure drastic improvement in our compliance with the appropriate regulatory frameworks, including the Municipal Staff Regulations 2021, through targeted support, monitoring and evaluation as well as intervention measures.

Our local government sector must pay attention to local economic development as they start their IDP processes. This process will be supported to ensure that we meet the required standards of compliance.

We will play a more proactive role to ensure that provincial and national government and the private sector contribute to the IDP process.

We will assist municipalities to improve the functionality of municipal planning tribunals in order to expedite development applications. We will also review administrative processes and remove red tape, which is a stumbling block to the ease of doing business and investment.

District municipalities and the Mangaung Metro have developed their 1st Generation One Plans, which were subsequently adopted by their councils. By April this year, 2nd Generation One Plans will be completed. We will institutionalise the District Development Model to embed the implementation of One Plans and cooperative governance.

The Jagersfontein mine disaster has impressed upon us the necessity to improve our disaster management capacity. Our capacity must be improved through a comprehensive approach that encompasses our infrastructure, planning, resourcing as well as our coordination and cooperation with other governmental and non-governmental institutions.

We are allocating R30 million over the MTEF period to improve this capacity. Municipal disaster management plans must be reviewed and include an assessment of the resilience of their infrastructure against extreme climatic events.

Honourable Speaker

Successful service delivery at provincial government level also requires an improvement in professionalization. Doing so will entail the implementation of the National Framework Towards the Professionalization of the Public Sector.

We appreciate the selfless service of committed government officials who execute their duties and responsibilities with diligence and dedication. These are the officials who live and breathe the Batho Pele principles.

They restore public trust and a sense of pride in government. We are entering a new chapter where there will be no protection of officials who fail to perform according to the requirements and expectations.

Next month I will commence with the Premier's Batho Pele sessions with officials to explore ways to enhance performance, improve service delivery, boost morale and promote innovation.

Considering the value we place on the institution of traditional leadership as a constituent part of our democracy, we engaged with the Traditional and Khoi-San leaders in August 2022 regarding matters that affect the institution of Traditional and Khoi-San leadership in the province. The process to fulfill pledges we made to strengthen the institution of traditional leadership will be further pursued.

Honourable Speaker

We strive for accountability and sustainability in the management of public finance. We continue to co-operate with the Office of the Auditor General in the execution of the PFMA and MFMA audit cycle.

The recent audit outcomes of the 2021/2022 provincial and local government audit cycle has shown a slight improvement. The Provincial Treasury must upscale their oversight and monitoring role to ensure that appropriate action is taken to accelerate the incremental improvement in audit outcomes. This will necessitate the improvement of the fiscal governance of departments, entities and municipalities.

A number of support interventions have been provided to improve the financial status of our municipalities. This includes the assessment of municipal budgets, the provision of supply chain management support, assessment and monitoring of audit action plans, the capacitation of internal audit and risk management as well as revenue management.

We have signed a number of Memorandums of Understanding to strengthen our relations with likeminded provinces in other countries.

We will revisit these cooperation agreements with the intention to strengthen collaboration on matters of common interest. We will further strengthen our relations with Lesotho on areas of economy, education and security as informed by our national protocols.

Conclusion

Honourable Speaker

We need renewed commitment to serve. We need to be bold, dedicated and attuned to the needs of our people at all times. They are the ones who fashioned the story of our democratic triumph.

In everything we do, we need to take the people along. With their support, we will continue to traverse the path of development in our endless pursuit of a better life for all. This is no distant dream.

The urgency of the moment requires us to do away with our old ways, old practices, and old convictions. The future ahead is filled with beaming dreams of opportunities and prosperity.

The achievements we have made as a province were never devoid of challenges. We are a resilient province that always fights for its survival. That's the spirit we witnessed during the fight against exclusionary apartheid system, it is the spirit we saw in the recent past when our people rose against state capture.

We know too well that there will always be challenges, but we have become tenacious enough to survive any hardship.

Here, we are working towards the future.

Together we must resolve to make our province great.

Yet again, we have a possibility to move forward and we dare not fail.

To invoke President Ramaphosa, "whatever the difficulties of the moment, whatever crises we face, we will rise to meet them together and, together we will overcome them".

I thank you all!