

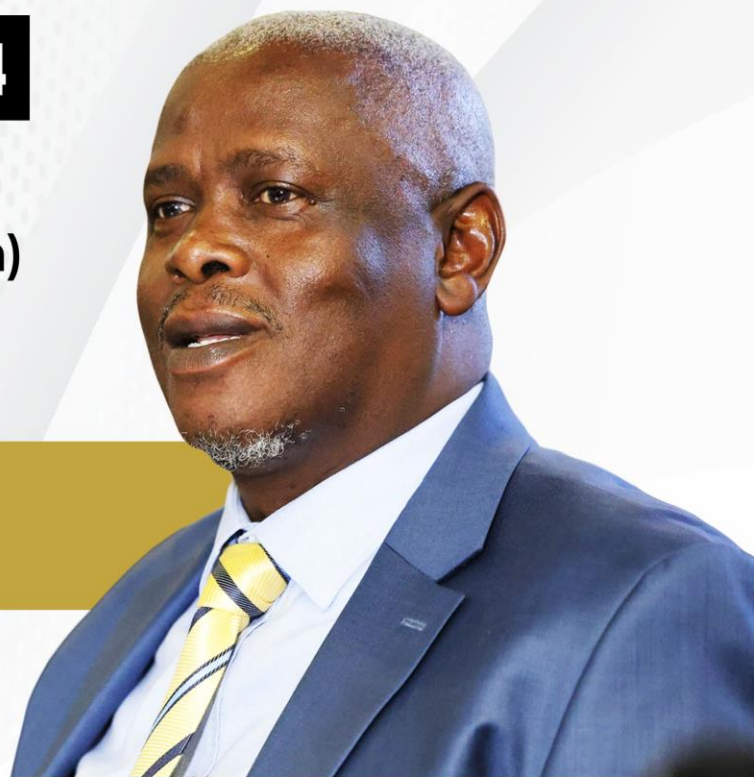
STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS



THURS, 29 FEBRUARY 2024

Venue: Phuthaditjhaba
Multi-Purpose Centre (Qwaqwa)
Time: 10:00

MXOLISI DUKWANA
PREMIER OF THE FREE STATE



FREE STATE PROVINCE





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 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
Our Special Guests
Ladies and Gentleman

This is the year of great significance in our history as we mark **30** years of the triumph of our hard-won **freedom and democracy**.

It is a year that builds a bridge between our tragic past, encouraging present and a brighter future.

And lest we forget, nothing about this freedom was ever free. Lives were lost, racism entrenched, households shattered and human rights crushed.

With the birth of democracy, the stage was set to carve a path anchored firmly on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

Central to the democratic transformation process was improving the living conditions of **South Africans** and fostering shared economic growth.



Driven by the relentless desire for a better life for all, we have over the past **30** years, invested time, resources and commitment in fighting the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Honourable Speaker

The courage of our people continues to be rewarded. Their hopes and dreams continue to be the spark that impels us to even greater heights.

Signs are everywhere that the **Free State** is a province on the move, confident in our actions and optimistic in our future trajectory.

We are making the most of our potential, harnessing our development efforts and leaving no one behind in a **Social Compact** with our people.

We have embarked on a programme of convening **Social Compact *Izimbizo*** in all districts, bringing together all sectors of society. Only the **Fezile Dabi District** is outstanding. We must acknowledge our engagements with the religious sector during these ***Izimbizo*** as critical to restore the moral fibre of our society.

Not only are we actively listening, but we are integrating their inputs into the planning and execution of government programmes and projects.

At the start of this **Sixth Administration**, we pledged to serve the people; to be the carriers of their dreams and enablers of their aspirations.

As we look back on the past, we are proud of the progress we have made. Today, life is just not the same.

But more still needs to be done, and tomorrow will be better than today.



Economic Sectors, Investment, Employment and Infrastructure

Honourable Speaker

We pledged to build a resilient, dynamic, inclusive and competitive economy with immense prospects for human development. This was to break away from the *apartheid* structural configuration of our economy.

Emphasis was now on economic recovery, job creation, and diversification to inspire the growth of other and new economic sectors.

It is no surprise that our contribution to the national **Gross Domestic Product** remained stable at **4,9%** between **2019** and **2022**. In the same period, the provincial economic growth rate recovered from **-0,1%** to **1,5%**.

This was achieved despite the challenges brought about by **COVID-19**. The pandemic resulted in serious economic challenges, not only at macro-economic level, but impacted significantly on our people, households and business at all levels. Our path to recovery has not been smooth.

We are still afflicted by the burden of unemployment. In the coming years, no effort will be spared to lessen this burden. Any small, but yet notable dent in unemployment is welcomed. Unemployment fell from **38,5%** in the **3rd** quarter of **2023** to **37%** in the **4th** quarter.



Our **Expanded Public Works Programme** and the **Presidential Employment Stimulus** is a demonstration of our efforts to ignite economic growth.

Today we can acknowledge that since **2019**, we have created **282 907** work opportunities against a five-year target of **260 000** work opportunities through this **Expanded Public Works Programme**.

The **Presidential Employment Stimulus** enabled us to benefit from the creation of **87 357** job opportunities, supporting **24 733** livelihoods and retaining **1 680** jobs in the period between **April** to **December 2023**.

These statistics include the **6 964 Education Assistants** and **8 285 General School Assistants** in the **Department of Education**. At the core of this education programme is the placement of unemployed youth in schools. This further illustrates how we give practical effect to our commitment to address youth unemployment. We must strengthen the coordination and maximize our participation in this programme.

Honourable Speaker

A strong agricultural sector is key for food security, job creation, poverty alleviation and rural development. Work is underway to position the **Free State** as the champion of the agricultural green revolution in the country.

Figures are telling in this regard. From **2019**, the agriculture sector steadily grew from **4,7%** in the **3rd** quarter to **5,1%** in the **3rd** quarter of **2023**.



This is to be expected considering our support to **227** red meat producers, **309** agro-processing initiatives and the creation of **152** green jobs.

A total of **4 543** producers were trained, and **249** students graduated from the **Glen Agricultural College**.

We have employed **120** graduates for a two-year period in the agricultural sector under the **Entrepreneurial Development Programme**.

We facilitated **19 023** export certificates, **29 419ha** of land was rehabilitated and **987ha** was cultivated using conservation practices. This will preserve the environment and increase production of organic products.

We are on course to revitalize the deciduous fruit industry. Recently, **R10 million** was disbursed to the **Remmoho Agri-Investment Project**. This investment will create **400** jobs over a three-year period resulting in the construction of a juice manufacturing plant targeting the export market.

Work is underway to avail provincial and municipal land for youth, women, people with disabilities and military veterans for farming purposes.

We will increase investment to support the commercialisation of **Black** farmers, investment in agro-logistics infrastructure and open new markets.

Honourable Speaker



There is no doubt that the much desired economic growth and development will be achieved if we harness our infinite energy potential.

We are hard at work to position the **Free State** as the country's central energy logistics, distribution and beneficiation hub.

The province has immense opportunities in natural gas, solar, coal, ethanol, wind, uranium, hydropower and hydrogen to power the future of our country.

To enhance and benefit from these investment prospects, we held the **Free State Energy Security Indaba** during **November** last year. Apart from serving as a platform for discussions, the **Indaba** was about investment attraction, exploration and collaboration on energy matters. Work is underway to implement commitments made during the **Indaba**. We are now unlocking over **R100 billion** of energy investment pipeline.

To effectively do so, we are enhancing the capacity of **Municipal Planning Tribunals** to speed-up land development application decisions.

Working with the **Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, Infrastructure South Africa**, the **Central Energy Fund** and investors; we will see the construction of renewable energy plants, issuing of exploration licenses and energy supply to the grid.

The discovery of natural gas in **December 2019** by **Reenergy** in **Virginia** has to date led to an investment of more than **R1,2 billion** and plans to invest another **R18 billion** to expand this project is underway.



Measures to establish an energy-focused **Special Economic Zone (SEZ)** in **Matjhabeng** to unlock the potential of natural gas have started.

We are also pursuing investment in the knowledge economy. This is evident from our cooperation with **Broadband Infraco** and **SITA**. **Phase 1** of the **Broadband Access Fund** project has provided broadband connectivity to **122** government facilities in **Thabo Mofutsanyana**.

Under **Phase 2**, the project will connect **4 921** households and **304 Wi-Fi Hotspots** in the **Fezile Dabi** and **Xhariep District Municipalities** by **March 2024**. In addition, **Broadband Infraco** in partnership with **Sentech** and **Internet Service Providers** will deploy **2 134 Community WiFi Hotspots** and enable **376 253** household connections over **3** years.

Honourable Speaker

Through investment, we can create jobs, lessen poverty and end inequality.

Earlier this week, we held the **Free State Investment Conference** to promote the province as an investment destination of choice. The **Conference** resulted in the pledging of **R81.5 billion**, particularly in the renewable energy, green mobility and retail sectors. A dedicated team from the **DTIC** and **Investment South Africa** will work with the province to convert these pledges into actionable investments.

We have made available resources for the establishment and implementation of an **Industrial Hemp Project** in **Xhariep District**.



Our economic transformation initiatives include the **Township Economy Revitalization Support**, refurbishment of factories, and launch of the revised **Free State Growth and Development Strategy**, the **Free State Spatial Development Framework** and the **Provincial Integrated Waste Management Plan**.

We are driving **youth entrepreneurship** to ignite their innovative passion. These are the change agents and trailblazers of the future.

We launched the **Free State Youth Business Pitching** competition to provide youth-owned start-ups with financial and non-financial support.

Our desire for growth is evident in our partnership with the **Maluti, Motheo and Goldfields TVET** colleges that led to **eight** start-ups being created.

We truly believe in **SMME** development. They are the bedrock of economic growth. Going forward, we have to escalate our support to this critical sector of the economy.

Financial support of **R28 million** was provided to **32 SMMEs** in logistics, agro-processing, tourism, ICT, wholesale and automotive sectors. **Ten** of these **SMMEs** were youth owned and **nine** women owned.

Rental incentives to **25 SMMEs** in **Industrial Parks** were also offered. Our **Industrial Parks** investment drive has led to employment of **5 571** people in **Botshabelo**, **516** in **Thaba Nchu** and **5 070** in **Phuthaditjhaba**.



Investment support was equally extended to aspiring industrialists. Today **Matla-a-Tau Maize Meal** in **Frankfort** is exporting maize and samp to **Lesotho**, **Swaziland** and the **DRC** because of government support.

We must continue our efforts to promote **Free State** tourism even more aggressively than in the past. Our initiatives such as the **Intra Trade Conference (SATOVITO)**, the **4X4 Eco Challenge** and other campaigns, leveraging off our natural resources, provide a platform to strengthen the **Free State's** share of the national and international tourism market.

Honourable Speaker

Roads and bridges facilitate trade, and connects people and towns. We will invest **R1,993 billion** in upgrading and maintaining roads as part of our **Township Revitalization Programme** and roads maintenance.

We escalated our roads construction and maintenance programme by transferring **568.75 km** of road to **SANRAL** during **October 2023**. This includes the **R26** between **Ladybrand** and **Bethlehem**, the **R34** from the **North West** provincial border at **Bloemhof** to the **KZN** border at **Vrede** and the **R74** from **Harrismith** to **Oliviershoek** (**KZN** border).

In addition, we transferred **222.70 km** earlier this month. These roads include the **R700** between **Bloemfontein** and **Bultfontein**, the **R710** between **Bultfontein** and **Welkom**, and the **R30** between the **R730** intersection north of **Theunissen** to **Odendalsrus**.

Ongoing provincial projects from the **2023/2024** financial year include:



- *Henneman - Kroonstad - Virginia*
- *Viljoenskroon - Orkney*
- *Senekal - Lindley*
- *Lindley - Petrus Steyn*
- *Zastron - Sterkspruit*
- *Tweespruit - Excelsior*
- *Senekal - Rosendal*
- *Rosendal - Ficksburg*
- *Koppies - Sasolburg*
- *Sasolburg - Heilbron (Phase 2)*
- *Jacobsdal - Koffiefontein*
- *Tweespruit - Hobhouse*
- *Qwaqwa Primary Roads (Setsing to Monontsha border, Matebeleng to Makgalaneng, Bolata Shopping Centre to Elizabeth Ross Hospital, Thiboloha to Maluti Bus Services, Riverside to Namahadi (Sekoto), Mmakong Village and Lusaka to Qholaqhwe Main Road).*

New projects that will commence in the 1st quarter of the 2024/25 financial year include the following:

- *Clocolan – Marquard*
- *Ladybrand - Hobhouse*
- *Dealesville - Hertzogville - Christiana border*
- *Oppermansgronde upgrade of gravel to surface road.*

Gravel roads are important for economic and social development and **R125 million** is budgeted for gravelling of roads throughout the province.



We have employed **650** youth through **Operation Vala Zonke** to speed up pothole repairs in our roads. This partnership with the **Central University of Technology** will also enhance our efforts to aggressively address skills development whilst maintaining our roads.

The joint **Welisizwe Rural Bridge Programme** with the **South African National Defence Force** to ensure accessibility in rural areas is ongoing. For our communities, these are the bridges of hope, pride and prosperity.

Social Protection, Community and Human Development

Honourable Speaker

Our people are the true wealth of our nation. Their education, health, development, social protection and well-being are our outmost priorities.

Our education success is a proof of the value we place in education to unlock our potential. Education is inspiring, liberating and empowering.

Since **2019**, we have remained the **Number One** performing province in the country. No other province has achieved this feat. The **Grade 12** class of **2023** achieved a notable pass rate of **89.03%**, retaining the uninterrupted record in the **Number One** spot for a five-year period.

This would have not been possible without the support and dedication of our educators, learners, parents, governing bodies and organized labour. Together, you are a formidable team and remain the essence of our long-lasting **Grade 12** success.

We call upon the education community, particularly our parents, to participate in the **School Governing Body** elections that will take place



in **March** this year. This is one of the key instruments in the practical manifestation of how democracy unfolds in the hands of our communities.

In these times of **Artificial Intelligence** and the **Internet of Things**, our drive to shape our development trajectory continues. A total of **3 490 Grade 8** learners in **21** schools and **2 693 Grade 9** learners in **19** schools were enrolled for **Coding and Robotics** in **2023**.

Investment in school infrastructure matters because it improves the learning environment, education outcomes and access to education. In the next **three** months, we will hand-over the following schools:

- ***Dr Sello Primary School in Viljoenskroon***
- ***Tshehetso Primary School in Bothaville***
- ***Katlego Mpumelelo Secondary School in Sasolburg***
- ***Breda Farm School Hostel in Fouriesburg***
- ***Leboneng Special School Hostel in Welkom***
- ***Oranjekrag School Hostel in Garijepdam***

Early Childhood Development is important to nurture the love for education and provide the foundation for all future learning. We are therefore investing in the expansion of **Grade R**.

According to **Statistics South Africa**, **41.9%** of the **0–4** year-olds in our province were attending **ECDs** in **2022**. This number was the highest in the country.



Educational toys were procured for **240 ECD** sites, **6 750** theme charts were distributed, and **500 ECD** practitioners were trained in the **National Curriculum Framework** and **250** underwent **NQF Level 4** training.

Honourable Speaker

As we intensify the provision of quality healthcare, we will implement programmes to educate communities about the benefits of the **National Health Insurance**, increase clinic operating hours and embark on a programme of healthy lifestyles.

Our **HIV/AIDS** programme continues to benefit **313 589 Anti-Retroviral Therapy** clients whilst **14 336** new clients were initiated on this therapy. A total of **98%** of eligible antenatal clients were initiated on **Anti-Retroviral Therapy**. The success of this programme is evident in **HIV** infection of babies born of **HIV-positive** mothers, which dropped to **0.6%**.

Our promise of universal access to quality healthcare requires investment in good infrastructure to better respond to increasing healthcare demands.

We are proud of the fact that **189** out of **219** clinics obtained an **Ideal Clinic** status. These are clinics with good infrastructure, adequate staff, adequate medicine and supplies, and good administrative processes.

The following hospitals attained an **Ideal Hospital** status as well:

- ***Parys Hospital***



- *Botshabelo Hospital*
- *JS Moroka Hospital*
- *Universitas Academic Hospital*
- *Phekolong Hospital*
- *Senorita Nhlabathi Hospital*

This ideal facility status is an essential part of our healthcare aspirations. More work is being done to embed this status in all our facilities.

Delivery of quality healthcare requires adequate professionals. Between **April** and **December 2023**, an additional **245 Doctors, 218 Nurses, 65 Allied Professionals, 15 Pharmacists** and **848 Non-clinical Staff** were employed. A further **61 doctors** who have completed their community service will be appointed with effect from the **1st of March**.

Early in **January** this year, **217** medical interns and community service professionals that include **Dieticians, Radiographers, Audiologists, Physiotherapists** and **Medical Practitioners** assumed duty in various health facilities in our province.

Use of technology solutions are now part of our healthcare provision. Last year in **November** we launched a digitisation project that entails a **Bophelo Mobile App** for ambulance requests, **Electronic Recruitment System, Digitisation of Paper Records** and **Telemedicine**.

We procured an additional **46 renal equipment units**, which will be deployed at all regional hospitals. This will ensure that patients are able to receive dialysis treatment closer to their places of residence.

Orthotic devices were issued to **6 518** people and **351** received medical prosthetic devices. A total of **4 798** cataract surgeries were performed.



Honourable Speaker

As a caring nation, we have an obligation to those most vulnerable.

Our **55 Community Nutrition and Development Centres** provide meals to vulnerable individuals and households. All in all, **19 562** individuals and **406** households benefitted from this food security programme.

We also launched the **Free State Food and Clothing Bank** in **December** last year to give hope and change the lives of the most vulnerable.

Last year we committed to appoint **38 Social Work Graduates** who were beneficiaries of government's bursary programme. We delivered on this promise and these graduates have been appointed.

Nothing justifies **violence against women and children**. We abhor and deplore acts of violence and abuse. There is a scourge that has developed in the province with the abduction, kidnapping and killing of young girls and women. This needs to stop, and stop now.

To assist those affected, our shelters for victims of **Gender-Based Violence** continues to provide important services in the province.

We have operationalised our **Safe House** in **Botshabelo** to provide emergency responses. We have also launched a shelter in **Koffiefontein**.



We will continue to provide care and protection services to **4 860** older persons and **1 262** persons with disabilities.

Honourable Speaker

Our human settlement approach remains grounded in the affirmation of human dignity, uniting people and communities as well as promoting spatial transformation by bringing people closer to their places of work.

We are reassured by **Statistics South Africa** confirming that by **2022**, **88.5%** of households in the **Free State** resided in formal dwellings as compared to **9.7%** who lived in informal dwellings.

Importantly, the number of households connected to the main electricity supply increased from **90,7%** in **2020** to **93,4%** in **2022** in the province.

We are implementing the **Asbestos Eradication Programme**. With the **DBSA** as an implementing agent, suitably qualified and skilled service providers were appointed. To date, the removal of asbestos and related work have been completed at **202 of these houses**.

The continued delivery of housing units is characterized by **two** aspects, namely the completion of **2 000** incomplete houses and the delivery of **1 872** planned housing units in the current financial year.

We have refocused our **Community Residential Units** work to ensure the completion of these catalytic projects. Repairs at **G-Hostel** in **Welkom** - with the capacity to house **780** units - have started. Similarly, work has commenced at **Dark** and **Silver City** in **Mangaung**. These **two Units** have a combined capacity of over **812** units.

We have also delivered **1 095** serviced sites to date in this financial year.



Our “**Title Deed Friday**”-programme with municipalities have resulted in the issuing of **19 334** registered title deeds. This programme will continue in the new financial year and we will further fast-track and streamline the process of issuing title deeds.

Honourable Speaker

Using the universal language of sport, arts and culture, we will continue to unite, inspire and celebrate our diversity in its varied forms. We look forward to the roll-out of a reimagined **MACUFE** later this year.

Currently, **32** young people are undergoing training in film and television production, **NQF Level 5**. A total of **610** are being recruited for internships within the film, tourism and hospitality sectors

We are pleased to announce that we will launch the **Premier’s Olympic Cup** in the next financial year where **five** sporting codes will be covered.

We congratulate **D’General Football Club** on their victory against **Madridtas FC** in the group stages of the **Nedbank Cup**. We wish them well as they battle it out in the last **16**. We will support them with resources to aid their campaign during this period.

We also wish to acknowledge the immense contribution of **Mme Sinki Leshabane**, the chairperson of **Mangaung Unite FC**, to sport development in the **Free State**. She has truly created a legacy and is creating a footprint that will serve generations to come.



The beautiful game of soccer holds immense power to unite our communities. We stand alongside the people of our province carrying a dream of restoring the province to professional football. This is not just about football, it is about injecting hope in communities, giving purpose to the youth and restoring the **Free State's** rightful place on the national stage.

We have to continue our investment in sport and recreation infrastructure. This is key to enable a holistic approach towards sport and recreation development. It also contributes to combating social ills. We will continue our relationships with the various sporting codes in the province.

This will enable the creation of more impactful opportunities for our sport men and women.

The process of enlisting the **Wesleyan Church**, which is the founding venue of the **ANC** into the **World Heritage List**, is ongoing. This historical site could be declared the **2nd World Heritage Site** in our province after the **Vredefort Dome Meteoritic Site**. The results will be announced by **UNESCO** during **July 2024**. We remain optimistic of the outcome.

We are transforming our heritage landscape to truly reflect who we are. This is evident from the completion of the **1st Phase** of research of **Black Concentration Camps** and suspected **Mass Graves** like **Thaba Lebitla** in **Winburg**. This is how we will tell our own stories and write our history.

Governance, State Capacity and Institutional Development



Honourable Speaker

Building state capacity, injecting urgency and efficiency in our work remain one of our non-negotiables.

We are intensifying our efforts to root-out maladministration and corruption in all its forms at all levels of government. The finalisation of the appointment of the **National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council** towards the end of **2023** now enables us to proceed with the establishment of the **Provincial Anti-Corruption Advisory Council**. It will synergize the work of various sectors in this critical environment.

The roll-out of **lifestyle audits** have commenced in various departments. We continue to cooperate with the **Special Investigating Unit** on proclamations issued by the **President** as well as the **Directorate of Priority Crime Investigations**. We are actively managing complaints management systems such as the **Presidential Hotline** whilst also collaborating with **Chapter 9** institutions such as the **Public Protector**, **Human Rights Commission**, and the **Public Service Commission**.

We remain resolute in our efforts to equip young people with appropriate and relevant skills. In the current financial year, **1 518 unemployed youth** benefitted from our **skills development programmes**.

As a result of a combined investment of numerous **SETAs** amounting to approximately **R131.5 million**, I am pleased to report that we have **3 060** unemployed graduates in our **Skills Development Programmes**.

Three hundred of these young people are benefiting from **Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning** as well as apprenticeship, and learnership programmes.



In addition, **1 976** students who completed their studies at higher education institutions but could not graduate as a result of outstanding debt, will benefit from the debt clearance programme.

We further commit to assist **3 000** young people in the next financial year by placing them in different skills development programmes.

A **Free State Skills Indaba** will be held in **March 2024**, focusing on skills for **SMME's** and unemployed **Youth in Skills Development Opportunities** to address the high unemployment rate in the province.

We also extend our gratitude to **SETAs** that have committed to fund these programmes for unemployed youth, mainly **MERSETA, Construction SETA, FASSET, Service, BankSETA** and **Energy and Water SETA**.

We will soon conclude a **R38 million** funding agreement with the **Unemployment Insurance Fund** to provide skills development to an additional **2 000** unemployed people.

We have allocated **200 new bursaries** to deserving students for this academic year. Approximately **R40 million** will be spend in this regard. **Statistics South Africa** data shows impressive progress in the provision of basic service delivery in the province in **2022**. This is evident from:

- A total of **94%** of households in the province had access to tap water inside their dwellings, off-site or on-site;



- The percentage of households with access to improved sanitation; improved from **85,8%** in **2020** to **87,9%** in **2022**;
- Households using flush toilets was at **78,7%**; and
- Households with refuse removal once per week totalled **72.2 %**.

Whilst these service delivery milestones are noteworthy, we must equally focus on the quality and consistency of the services we provide.

The **Honourable President Cyril Ramaphosa** said at his inauguration on **25 May 2019** that; “The challenges that we face are real. But they are not insurmountable.” The continued challenges with our water supply and quality, waste water management, refuse removal and road maintenance in our cities and towns require our urgent intervention.

Now we are turning the tide as recent developments demonstrate:

- The **Jagersfontein - Fauresmith Bulk Water Supply** is now complete.
- Working together with the **Department of Water and Sanitation**, we will finish the construction of the reversal gravity pipeline in **Qwaqwa**.
- The refurbishment and upgrading of the **Fika Patso Water Purification Plant** will be completed by **April**.
- **Five** non-functioning **Waste Water Treatment Works** in **Maluti-a-Phofung** as well as the **Koffiefontein** and **Matjhabeng Waste Water Treatment** facilities will be repaired.



- Funding has been made available for the installation of a **Lab Information Management System** and **Computers** in the **Thabo Mofutsanyana Water Laboratory** to improve water quality.
- We will soon be launching the **Distribution Agency Agreement** between **Maluti-a-Phofung** and **Eskom**. This one of its kinds initiative will stabilise the provision of electricity in this municipality.

We are actively encouraging and supporting municipalities to participate in the **Eskom** debt relief programme.

The introduction of the smart-meter conditional grant recently announced by the **Minister of Finance** will benefit municipalities that participate in the **Eskom** debt-relief programme. This will enhance the existing provincial initiative to provide funding for the roll-out of smart meter programmes in municipalities such as **Tswelopele**.

Municipalities that have been provisionally approved to participate in the debt relief programme include:

- ***Mangaung Metro***
- ***Nala Local Municipality***
- ***Masilonyana Local Municipality***
- ***Matjhabeng Local Municipality***
- ***Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality***
- ***Dihlabeng Local Municipality***
- ***Nketoana Local Municipality***
- ***Ngwathe Local Municipality***
- ***Moqhaka Local Municipality***
- ***Phumelela Local Municipality***
- ***Tswelopele Local Municipality***



Honourable Speaker

We continue to benefit from the wisdom and experience of the collective traditional leadership in the **Free State**. Our institutions of traditional leadership remain our critical partners in the development and empowerment of rural communities. We will continue to work with our traditional leadership on questions such as land and service delivery. I will be addressing these issues in more detail during the opening of the **House of Traditional Leaders** tomorrow, on the **1st of March**.

To improve service delivery at local government level, we are continuing to professionalize and build the capacity of municipalities. Initiatives in this regard include:

- The process of appointment of vacant, critical and funded senior management positions in municipalities must be concluded by **April 2024**.
- We are working with **SALGA** and the **LGSETA** to provide municipal leadership and institutional development training programmes
- An initiative to make available professional **engineers** in municipalities to support critical infrastructure development, maintenance and repair work have commenced. Other professional unemployed graduates in the built-environment will also be afforded the opportunity to gain practical experience at municipalities.
- Commissioning research and reviewing the impact of **climate change** and the **disaster management** capacity of municipalities that will inform further initiatives to be undertaken.



- We have launched the annual “**Cleanest and Greenest Municipalities**” competition during **December 2023** with the objective to promote better environmental management practices, social upliftment and economic growth under the ambit of the green economy. The key elements include waste management, energy efficiency and water management and conservation, landscaping, tree planting and beautification as well as community empowerment.
- Our support to municipalities also include measures to improve their financial viability. We will continue to support selected municipalities to improve the revenue value chain as well as other technical support on accounting, budgeting, supply chain and internal auditing.
- We initiated **Supply Chain Management** training for **22** municipalities on the reduction of unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

We applaud **National Treasury’s** focused support to seven identified municipalities, namely:

- ***Mafube Local Municipality***
- ***Metsimaholo Local Municipality***
- ***Matjhabeng Local Municipality***
- ***Tokologo Local Municipality***
- ***Mantsopa Local Municipality***
- ***Nketoana Local Municipality***
- ***Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality***



Moving forward, **COGTA** and **Provincial Treasury** will develop and implement **Financial Recovery Plans** for **Kopanong, Masilonyana** and **Mohokare** local municipalities.

Provincial Treasury will further drive the **financial literacy campaign** both in provincial and local government. The beneficiaries of this campaign is both public servants and communities.

Honourable Speaker

Public resources used by provincial and local government need to achieve set development objectives.

We have seen an encouraging improvement of **83%** in the submission of annual financial statements by municipalities for the **2022/2023** financial year. Clearly, we must continue our efforts to improve to **100%**.

Provincial audit outcomes continue to show steady improvement. We congratulate the **Provincial Treasury, Free State Legislature** and the **Fleet Management** for obtaining clean audit opinions for **2022/23**.

Overall, more than **66%** of departments received unqualified or clean audit opinions in **2022/23**. This is an improvement from the **42%** in **2018/19**.

We are enhancing integrated service delivery through the **District Development Model**. We will review the **One Plans** of districts and the Metro, inclusive of catalytic projects.



We will elevate the **Jagersfontein Presidency Intervention Programme** as the anchor initiative for the **Xhariep District Municipality's One Plan**.

Justice, Crime Prevention and Security

Honourable Speaker

We want a safe and secure **Free State**. The crime fighting results of the multi-agency cooperation are significant.

The **South African Police Service** statistics for the **3rd** quarter of **2023** indicate a decline of the following crimes: murder, robbery at residential premises, carjacking, malicious damage to property and stock-theft.

Operations by the **South African Police Service** include addressing the high levels of **Gender-Based Violence** and **Femicide** in the province. Part of our work against **Gender-Based Violence** is ensuring adherence to the **Domestic Violence Act** and that **Victim Friendly Rooms** are functional. **88** police stations have established **Victim Friendly Rooms** and **23** are using alternative rooms, but still offer the same services.

By the **3rd** quarter of **2023/2024**, we conducted an audit of **54** police stations to determine the functionality of the **Victim Friendly Rooms**. Sector policing was also implemented in the top **30** contact crime stations.

The **Cross Border Forum** is active and engagements with **KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Gauteng** and **Lesotho** were held to strategize and implement actions aimed at the prevention and detection of vehicle, stock and fire arm theft as well as crimes associated with illegal substances.



Theft and vandalism of our critical infrastructure is economic sabotage. The **South African Police Service** has identified critical infrastructure vandalism and theft hotspots and a special task team has been established in **Lejweleputswa** to address these criminal activities.

Both **Operation Knock Out** and **Operation Vala Mokoti** are ongoing to root-out the scourge of illicit mining in **Matjhabeng**. We mean it when we say we will stop at nothing to deal with **Zama Zamas**.

Operation Phethisa Molao continues to address some of the following crimes: theft of motor vehicles, illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling of minerals, wild life crimes and stock theft.

We are not deterred. We will go into the heart and soul of these activities.

Honourable Speaker

Many people have fallen victim to the misfortunes of substance abuse. Lives have been destroyed, families shattered and society threatened by drug abuse. This cannot continue. We want a drug free society.

Non-profit organisations have been supported to fight substance abuse and provide treatment services throughout the province. As a result, **48 425** people have been reached through this initiative.

Drug Action Committees have been established in **11** municipalities to coordinate the implementation of the **Drug Master Plan** in communities.



School safety officers have been allocated to every school linked to the nearest police station. The **South African Police Service** have increased visibility at identified schools in **Mangaung** and **Matjhabeng**.

We take safety on our roads seriously and we are committed to maintaining law and order through the provision of traffic policing services.

Although there was a **50%** increase in fatalities for the **Easter 2023 period**, we achieved a **27.17%** reduction in fatalities in our roads during the **2023 Festive Season**.

We are grateful to the **South African Breweries** for donating **two** fully equipped trucks that are used as **Mobile Alcohol Evidence Centres** for on-site alcohol testing of road users in our road-blocks.

True partnership with communities is important to fight crime. This is why we are intensifying the functionality of **Community Policing Forums**. Interventions include the provision of resources such as uniforms, the payment of stipend to **Patrollers** and the provision of necessary equipment for fighting crime.

Our crime fighting efforts will also entail the use of technology. Additional **CCTV** cameras will be installed in strategic areas for crime prevention.

Police visibility and work with the **Border Management Authority** to secure our borders from illegal activities will also be intensified.

Abandoned buildings are havens for criminal activities and hide outs for criminals. Measures are being put in place to deal with these buildings.



This includes the **15** properties that have been repurposed for government use since **2019**. Various other models such as Build-Operate-Transfer, Long and Short-term Leases, Refurbish-Operate-Transfer and Outright Sale of these abandoned buildings are under consideration.

Conclusion

Honourable Speaker

As we celebrate **30** years of democracy, there is no doubt that the **Free State** is a much better place today than it was **30** years ago.

It is the people of the **Free State** who have fashioned the story of our democracy. They have shaped these achievements.

So, as we celebrate **30** years, we equally celebrate the contribution of all residents of the **Free State**.

We are humbled that you have entrusted us with the responsibility to serve you. And for the privilege that you have granted us, we say thank you.

We commit to still serve you with dedication. We look forward to another opportunity to put your trust in us. Our victory is a victory for a better life.

In the coming years, we will still rise to the challenge to serve you. As we reflect on these **30** years, we cannot overemphasise the urgency and determination needed to deal with the challenges that confront us.



With our collective effort, these challenges will wither away.

Allow me to express my gratitude to the **Members of the Executive Council**, the **Director-General** and **Heads of Departments** for their collective leadership to ensure that the **Free State Provincial Government** continues to meet the expectations of our people.

We also extend our gratitude to **government workers**, across all spheres, who are the bedrock of service delivery. We pay our respect to **Mr Clifford Masole**, a municipal worker in the **Setsoto** municipality, who had the tragic misfortune of being electrocuted while bravely tackling electricity challenges. We must appreciate the commitment of workers like Mr **Masole** who ensures that we meet our service delivery targets, notwithstanding the dangers.

We wish him a speedy recovery and hope his commitment shall inspire other government officials to take pride in their work.

My gratitude to all political parties for traversing this democracy with us.

Most importantly, my appreciation to the **ANC** for the opportunity to lead. I will forever remain humbled by the confidence you have shown in me.

I thank you!