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STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

A CALL TO ACTION FOR ALL SOUTH AFRICANS

TODAY, FRIDAY THE 9TH OF FEBRUARY, we will deliver the State of the Nation Address marking the ninth opening session of the parliament of democratic South Africa.

The tradition has now been established that this address should give a clear indication of the government's plans for the year.

Among other things, this enables all the political parties in parliament to state their own view about the direction the country should take and to comment on the overall programme of the government and not merely elements of this programme.

Of equal importance, the occasion of this address also enables the millions who elected the government and all the members of parliament to get an idea of what is in store for the year. Inevitably, many in other parts of the world also pay attention to the address. Accordingly, I hope this journal and the ANC Communications Unit



will make their own effort to ensure that our people are properly informed about the content of the address, avoiding selective reporting and sensationalism.

As we have advanced further away from our first year of liberation, 1994, so has it become possible for both the ANC and the government to proceed from the general to the particular, from the macro to the micro picture, with greater certainty and assurance.

This is a function or derivative of various factors. Among these are the more precise understanding of the state of our society, better capacity to achieve this understanding, an enhanced ability to elaborate concrete, accurate and appropriate plans, programmes and policies and the creation of the means to implement these plans, programmes and policies.

Obviously, where political change consists in a mere change of government, the task of evolving and implementing new policies is relatively easy. In our case, however, we have experienced both a change of government and a change of the entire social system - a revolution.

It was therefore inevitable that we would take some time to 'settle down and settle in'.

My firm view is that, despite the difficult situation we had to and continue to face, we have made significant progress in coping with the challenges of the combined forces of revolution and reform.

Accordingly, today's address will reflect our capacity to combine the general and the specific in our planning. It will spell out a programme of action to whose evolution the government has paid a significant amount of time.

At the same time, it will be a programme of action informed by the existing policies of the ANC and its allies, including the manifesto which two-thirds of our electorate mandated us to implement.

Among other things, those policies visualise both people-centred and people-driven processes of change. The programme of action we will announce today is characterised by both of these features.

It requires that all of us act together as South Africans for the collective benefit and for the improvement of the standard and quality of life of every individual South African. This is one of the reasons why we shall have to make a special effort to ensure that as many of our people as possible understand the address to the nation.

Since our liberation in 1994, we have sought to find the ways and means by which we could encourage our people to abandon the notion that all they needed to do to achieve development was to wait for the government 'to deliver'. The involvement of the people in their own development is what lies at the heart of the Masakhane Campaign.

We have also sought to communicate the important message that the happiness, peace and security of our fellow white South Africans, as with the rest of our people, depends on their joining hands with the rest to wipe out the racist legacy of the apartheid system and to bring about the reconstruction and development of our country.

The government programme of action for The Year of the African Century, which we will announce today, provides and calls for the united action of all South Africans, to bring about the change that we all desire and which our country needs.

I sincerely hope that no South African will be dissuaded from participating in this historic joint effort by listening to the comments that will inevitably be made by those who think that their first task is to oppose the government, rather than to oppose poverty,



underdevelopment and the racism and sexism that continue to afflict the overwhelming majority of our people.

It is certainly the task of the ANC to help mobilise the people, without regard to race, colour, gender or age, to be activists in the continuing struggle for a better life for all.

After all, what the state of the nation address is about is the pursuit of the goal of a better life for all in our country and continent, to which the government is committed.

The objectives it will detail have to be achieved through action by the people, for the people.



Read the full text of the State of the Nation address

ANC MESSAGE ON HIV/AIDS

PREVENTION IS OUR BEST DEFENCE

CENTRAL TO THE ANC's campaign against HIV/Aids is the message that preventing the spread of the HIV virus is the best defence against Aids.

This message reinforces the organisation's commitment to addressing the role of poverty in the spread of Aids; to ensuring adequate care and treatment for people with HIV infection and Aids; and to combat prejudice and discrimination against HIV positive people.

The campaign around prevention encourages safer and more responsible sexual practices, including abstinence from sex for as long as possible, faithfulness to a single sexual partner and the consistent use of condoms. This is known as the A-B-C message.

For its part government has been involved in a massive public awareness campaign. During the last financial year alone, government distributed over 200 million condoms through the public health system. It has introduced the HIV policy for learners and educators which has led to the inclusion of life skills programmes as a compulsory part of the curriculum in schools.

While HIV/Aids can affect anybody, it hits the poor hardest. The programme to combat the epidemic must therefore be part of the fight against poverty: to make basic health services, clean water and sanitation accessible to all South Africans; to improve nutrition and food security; to fight against diseases such as tuberculosis, STDs and malnutrition; and to promote the empowerment of women and young people.

Managing HIV infection requires, as a starting point, identification of those who are infected in a non-discriminating and non-

threatening way. The ANC in government is therefore increasing access to counseling and voluntary testing at health facilities and non-medical sites. It is promoting the use of rapid tests that have proven to be accessible, and cost-effective.

A second area of focus is the treatment of opportunistic infections such as pneumonia, diarrhea, skin infections and fungal infections. It has been shown in many countries that if opportunistic infections are diagnosed early and managed rigorously, people who are HIV positive can lead longer and productive lives.

The ANC promotes affordable and equitable access to medicines for all our people, supporting efforts of government to engage pharmaceutical companies as part of the international effort to ensure affordable access to medicines, including medicines used against HIV/AIDS in the developing world.

As a country, South Africa cannot currently afford the use of antiretrovirals for wide scale treatment at their current prices. It does not have the adequate infrastructure necessary to monitor any widespread introduction of antiretroviral drugs for treatment purposes in the public health system.

There is a lot of evidence that where antiretrovirals are introduced without the necessary meticulous follow-up, which requires good laboratory support, then the outcomes are at times worse than if people had not been put on these drugs at all.

The interests of public health and those of our people are better served by government investing in the all-round development of a robust public health infrastructure and health system to better confront the many diseases we face - such as TB, malnutrition, malaria, cholera and opportunistic infections - as opposed to spending all our limited resources on the purchase of antiretrovirals.

This approach is consistent with that of many other countries and is backed by solid scientific evidence, which indicates that early and aggressive treatment of opportunistic infections leads to a prolonged, good quality, and fully productive life.

Our programme also includes fighting discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and creating a supportive and caring social environment for AIDS orphans and other affected individuals. Many legal and other measures already in place prohibit discrimination against those with HIV/AIDS including at work and in our schools.

The ANC acknowledges that HIV/AIDS is a complex disease entity about which not everything is known. The ANC, as an organisation and in government, will continue to act on the basis of what is known and within the limits of the country's resources.

Useful information on some of the questions which still exist around HIV and Aids can be found in an article that appeared in the New York Times on 30 January called 'The AIDS questions that linger'.

RACIAL RELATIONS

HYPOCRISY DRESSED UP AS RECONCILIATION WILL NOT BRING ABOUT NECESSARY CHANGES

THE 'GESTURES OF RECONCILIATION' recently embarked upon by the leader of the Democratic Alliance's New National Party (NNP) component, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, is reminiscent of PW Botha's offer in the mid-1980s to release the then imprisoned Nelson Mandela if he renounced the armed struggle as an indication of his commitment to peace.

By refusing even to acknowledge that racially-based privilege remains the primary hurdle to reconciliation in South Africa - never mind supporting efforts to end racial privilege - Van Schalkwyk is doing much to live up to the hypocrisy of his infamous predecessor.

This latter-day PW Botha paid a visit recently to the memorial erected in honour of the Cradock Four - Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mhlauli - as a gesture of reconciliation. Yet what value is the gesture when Van Schalkwyk's party continues to deny its involvement in the death of the four and hundreds of thousands of other South Africans, black and white?

In the party's submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, then leader FW de Klerk said: "The unconventional strategies from the side of the government never included the authorisation of assassination, murder, torture, rape, assault or the like."

The NNP has yet to acknowledge the glaring dishonesty of this statement.

More significantly however, the NNP and the Democratic Alliance (DA) as a whole is seeking reconciliation without accepting the grounds on which racial division in South Africa is based. It refuses to accept that whites as a group were improperly materially privileged through apartheid, and that blacks were unjustly deprived of economic and other opportunities.

It refuses to accept that to this day the primary defining characteristic of South African society is the gross inequalities of wealth and opportunity between whites and blacks. These inequalities are reinforced - and themselves reinforce - wholly unequal power relations between black and white, power relations that make possible the kind of racial assaults and murders that are commonplace on the country's farms and urban areas.

The DA accuses anyone who dares to point out this basic reality as inciting racial conflict, and criticises efforts to redress these racial imbalances as themselves racist.

Until the DA, Van Schalkwyk and the rest of PW Botha's political lineage are able to own up to the reality of South Africa today, they will forestall the thoroughgoing reconciliation that the majority of South Africans, black and white, so eagerly seek.