



STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

**8 FEBRUARY 2024
CAPE TOWN CITY HALL**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Masondo,
Deputy President Paul Mashatile,
Former President Thabo Mbeki,
Former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Baleka Mbete,
Chief Justice Raymond Zondo,
Deputy Chief Justice Mandisa Maya,
Mayor of Cape Town, Cllr Geordin Hill-Lewis,
Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Regional Deans,
Heads of Institutions Supporting Democracy,
Eminent Persons representing our nine provinces,
Members of Parliament,
Fellow South Africans,

As we were preparing for this State of the Nation Address, we were deeply saddened to hear of the tragic passing of Dr Hage Geingob, the President of Namibia.

President Geingob was a dear friend of the South African people and a comrade in arms in the struggle for our freedom. He was a champion of African peace, progress and development.

May I ask that we observe a moment of silence in his honour.

Fellow South Africans,

This State of the Nation Address takes place in the 30th year of our democracy.

On the 27th of April 1994, millions of South Africans cast their ballot in a democratic election for the first time in their lives.

That momentous day was the culmination of centuries of struggle, the struggle to liberate our people from suffering and oppression, from dispossession and exploitation, from poverty and inequality.

As we stood in the long, winding queues to vote, we turned to one another and spoke of our joy.

We embraced friends and strangers alike, encouraged by a sense of a common future that we were about to determine for our country with our vote.

We placed into those ballot boxes not just a vote, but a dream of the country we wanted to build.

It was the dream of a South Africa that, in every sense, belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

The world watched as Nelson Mandela, the father of our nation, cast his vote in Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal; the land of uShaka, a hero whose name echoes across the ages; the birthplace of John Langalibalele Dube, the first President of the ANC, which united the African people; and the home of Chief Albert Luthuli, the first African Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

After casting his ballot, Madiba said:

“This is the beginning of a new era. We have moved from an era of pessimism, division, limited opportunities, turmoil and conflict. We are starting a new era of hope, reconciliation and nation building.”

It is this dream, of a free and united people, that is woven into our democratic Constitution.

It is this Constitution that has guided our collective efforts over the last three decades to fundamentally change our country for the better, and it must stand at the centre of the work we do now to build a better life for all.

Over the last three decades, we have been on a journey, striving together to achieve a new society – a national democratic society.

We have cast off the tyranny of apartheid and built a democratic state based on the will of the people.

We have established strong institutions to protect the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all people.

We have transformed the lives of millions of South Africans, providing the necessities of life and creating opportunities that never existed before.

We have enabled a diverse economy whose minerals, agricultural products and manufactured goods reach every corner of the world, while creating jobs in South Africa.

As a country, we have returned to the community of nations, extending a hand of peace and friendship to all countries and all peoples.

Just as we cannot deny the progress South Africans have made over the last 30 years, nor should we diminish the severe challenges that we continue to face.

We have endured times of great difficulty, when the strength of our constitutional democracy has been severely tested.

There have been times when events beyond our borders have held back our progress.

The global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 brought to an end a decade of strong growth and faster job creation.

More recently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has contributed to rising prices of fuel, food and other goods across the world – and has, as a result, made life more difficult for all South Africans.

There have also been times when events at home have shaken the foundations of our constitutional democracy.

Perhaps the greatest damage was caused during the era of state capture.

For a decade, individuals at the highest levels of the state conspired with private individuals to take over and repurpose state owned companies, law enforcement agencies and other public institutions.

In some cases, these activities were enabled by local and multinational companies.

Billions of rands that were meant to meet the needs of ordinary South Africans were stolen. Confidence in our country was badly eroded. Public institutions were severely weakened.

The effects of state capture continue to be felt across society, from the shortage of freight locomotives to crumbling public services, from the poor performance of our power stations to failed development projects.

But South Africans, including many honest and dedicated public officials, fought back and worked together to defeat state capture.

Even then, attempts to thwart the country's recovery continued.

We recall with great anguish the events of July 2021, when individuals loyal to their own interests sought to provoke a popular insurrection, leading to a tragic loss of life and widespread destruction.

Again, they were unsuccessful.

These efforts to undo the hard-won gains of our freedom failed because the people of South Africa stood firm, together, in defence of our Constitution and its promise of a better life for all.

It was the same determination that enabled the country to endure the devastation of COVID-19, the worst global pandemic in over a century.

More than 100,000 South Africans lost their lives to the disease and two million people lost their jobs.

Yet it would have been far worse if we had not acted together as one to stop the spread of the virus, to support our health workers, to protect the most vulnerable, and to roll out an unprecedented vaccination programme.

We were able to unite society around a common effort to save lives and livelihoods.

I want to pay tribute to the many thousands of South Africans who made financial contributions to the Solidarity Fund, to the workers who produced medical supplies, and to the nurses, doctors and other health workers who risked their lives to care for those who were ill.

Another major challenge we had to address is gender-based violence and femicide which we characterised as the second pandemic.

As the government, we have introduced laws and directed more resources to prosecuting perpetrators, providing better support to survivors, and promoting women's economic empowerment.

As a society, we must intensify our collective efforts to bring gender-based violence and femicide to an end.

In recent years, the country has had to confront the effects of climate change.

We have had devastating wildfires in the Western Cape, destructive floods in KwaZulu-Natal, unbearable heatwaves in the Northern Cape, persistent drought in the Eastern Cape, and intense storms in Gauteng.

Much of the task of this administration was to get our country through these great challenges and to work to regain our way.

While each of these events has left its mark, our country has weathered every storm.

Yes, we have the scars to show. But in every case South Africans have been resolute.

We have not only persevered, but we have come back stronger and more determined.

All these efforts have demonstrated how South Africans value the freedom that was won after decades of struggle.

The story of the first 30 years of our democracy can be best told through the life of a child called Tintswalo born at the dawn of freedom in 1994.

Tintswalo – democracy's child – grew up in a society that was worlds apart from the South Africa of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

She grew up in a society governed by a constitution rooted in equality, the rule of law, and affirmation of the inherent dignity of every citizen.

Tintswalo, and many others born at the same time as her, were beneficiaries of the first policies of the democratic state to provide free health care for pregnant women and children under the age of six.

Tintswalo's formative years were spent in a house provided by the state, one of millions of houses built to shelter the poor.

Tintswalo grew up in a household provided with basic water and electricity, in a house where her parents were likely to have lived without electricity before 1994.

Tintswalo was enrolled in a school in which her parents did not have to pay school fees, and each school day she received a nutritious meal as part of a programme that today supports 9 million learners from poor families.

The democratic state provided a child support grant to meet her basic needs. This grant, together with other forms of social assistance, continues to be a lifeline for more than 26 million South Africans every month.

With this support, Tintswalo – democracy's child – was able to complete high school.

Through the assistance the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, Tintswalo attended one of our TVET colleges and obtained a qualification.

When Tintswalo entered the world of work, she was able to progress and thrive with the support of the state's employment equity and black economic empowerment policies.

With the income she earned, she was able to save, to start a family, to move into a better house, and to live a better life.

This is the story of millions of people who have been born since the dawn of our democracy.

But it is only part of the story.

For despite the remarkable achievements of the last 30 years, many of democracy's children still face great challenges.

Millions of young people aged 15 to 24 years are currently not in employment, education or training.

There are many who have a matric, a diploma or a degree who cannot find a job, or do not have the means to start a business.

While economic growth is essential to reduce unemployment, we cannot wait to provide the work that many of democracy's children need.

As government we have taken steps to address the youth unemployment challenge.

Three years ago, building on the success of the Expanded Public Works Programme, we launched the Presidential Employment Stimulus.

Through this programme, we have created more than 1.7 million work and livelihood opportunities.

Through the stimulus, we have placed more than 1 million school assistants in 23,000 schools, providing participants with valuable work experience while improving learning outcomes.

Through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, we established SAYouth.mobi as a zero-rated platform for unemployed young people to access opportunities for learning and earning.

Over 4.3 million young people are now engaged on the network and 1.6 million have so far secured opportunities.

We have, working together with the National Youth Development Agency, set up a number of initiatives to provide opportunities for young people including the National Youth Service and the Youth Employment Service.

These programmes matter because work matters to people. The NYDA has played a key role in assisting a number of young people to start their own businesses.

Having a job does not only provide an income – it is fundamental to people's sense of self-worth, dignity, hope, purpose and inclusion.

From the depths of deprivation and inequality, we have worked over 30 years to ensure that all South Africans have an equal chance to prosper.

It is not enough to recognise the injustices of the past; we need to correct them.

We have introduced laws and undertaken programmes to enable black South Africans and women to advance in the workplace, to become owners and managers, to acquire land and build up assets.

The proportion of jobs in executive management held by black people increased almost five-fold between 1996 and 2016.

One of the overriding challenges this administration had to deal with when it took office was state capture and corruption.

Our first priority was to put a decisive stop to state capture, to dismantle the criminal networks within the state and to ensure that perpetrators faced justice.

We had to do that so that we could restore our institutions and rebuild our economy.

We appointed capable people with integrity to head our law enforcement agencies, government departments, security services and state companies, often through an independent and transparent processes.

The credibility and efficiency of a number of institutions like the South African Revenue Service have been restored and their performance improved.

We set up the Investigating Directorate as a specialised and multidisciplinary unit within the National Prosecuting Authority to investigate corruption and other serious crimes.

Great progress has been made in bringing those responsible for state capture to justice.

More than 200 accused persons are being prosecuted. More are under investigation.

Stolen funds are being recovered.

Freezing orders of R14 billion have been granted to the NPA's Asset Forfeiture Unit for state capture-related cases, and around R8.6 billion in corrupt proceeds have been returned to the state.

A restored and revitalised SARS has collected R4.8 billion in unpaid taxes as a result of evidence presented at the Commission, while the Special Investigating Unit has instituted civil litigation to the value of R64 billion.

We have taken steps, including through new legislation, to strengthen our ability to prevent money laundering and fraud and secure our removal from the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force.

With the assistance of business, we have set up a digital forensic capability to support the NPA Investigating Directorate, which in due course will be expanded to support law enforcement more broadly.

Legislation is currently before Parliament to establish the Investigating Directorate as a permanent entity with full investigating powers.

But there is much more work to be done to eradicate corruption completely.

Based on the recommendations of the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council, we are determined to introduce further measures to strengthen our anti-corruption agencies, protect whistle-blowers, regulate lobbying and prevent the undue influence of public representatives in procurement.

We will not stop until every person responsible for corruption is held to account.

We will not stop until all stolen money has been recovered.

We will not stop until corruption is history.

The real tragedy of state capture was that it diverted attention and resources away from what government should have been doing, which is to grow our economy and create jobs.

Over the past five years, we have worked to revive our economy from a decade of stagnation and protect it from both domestic and global shocks.

We have made progress.

Our economy is today three times larger than it was 30 years ago.

The number of South Africans in employment increased from 8 million in 1994 to over 16.7 million now.

Over the last two years, the number of jobs being created has been increasing every quarter, and we now have more people in employment than before the pandemic.

Yet, our unemployment rate is the highest it has ever been.

Even as employment is growing, more people are entering the job market each year than jobs are being created.

We have laid a foundation for growth through far-reaching economic reforms, an ambitious investment drive, and an infrastructure programme that is starting to yield results.

Companies continue to invest, thousands of hectares of farmland are being planted, new factories are being opened and production is being expanded.

We are on track to resolve the most important constraints on economic growth by stabilising our energy supply and fixing our logistics system.

As these obstacles are removed, the true potential of our economy is unleashed.

We set out a clear plan to end load shedding, which we have been implementing with a single-minded focus through the National Energy Crisis Committee.

We have delivered on our commitments to bring substantial new power through private investment on to the grid, which is already helping to reduce load shedding.

Last year, we implemented a major debt relief package which will enable Eskom to make investments in maintenance and transmission infrastructure and ensure its sustainability going forward.

Since we revived our renewable energy programme five years ago, we have connected more than 2,500 MW of solar and wind power to the grid with three times this amount already in procurement or construction.

Through tax incentives and financial support, we have more than doubled the amount of rooftop solar capacity installed across the country in just the past year.

We have implemented sweeping regulatory reforms to enable private investment in electricity generation, with more than 120 new private energy projects now in development.

These are phenomenal developments that are driving the restructuring of our electricity sector in line with what many other economies have done to increase competitiveness and bring down prices.

Through all of these actions, we are confident that the worst is behind us and the end of load shedding is finally within reach.

But we are not stopping there.

To ensure that we never face a similar crisis ever again, we are reforming our energy system to make it more competitive, sustainable and reliable into the future.

We are going to build more than 14,000km of new transmission lines to accommodate renewable energy over the coming years.

To fast-track this process, we will enable private investment in transmission infrastructure through a variety of innovative investment models.

Last year, we tabled the Electricity Regulation Amendment Bill to support the restructuring of Eskom and establish a competitive electricity market.

As we undertake these reforms, we are positioning our economy for future growth in a world shaped by climate change and a revolution in green technologies.

In the last three years, our country has seen an increase in extreme weather events, often with disastrous consequences.

This is why we are implementing a just energy transition, not only to reduce carbon emissions and fight climate change, but to create growth and jobs for our own people.

We will undertake this transition at a pace, scale and cost that our country can afford and in a manner that ensures energy security.

With our abundance of solar, wind and mineral resources, we are going to create thousands of jobs in renewable energy, green hydrogen, green steel, electric vehicles and other green products.

The Northern Cape, with its optimal solar conditions, has already attracted billions of rands in investment.

We are going to set up a Special Economic Zone in the Boegoebaai port to drive investment in green energy. There is a great deal of interest from the private sector to participate in the boom that will be generated green hydrogen energy projects.

We have decided to support electric vehicle manufacturing in South Africa to grow our automotive sector, which provides good jobs to thousands of workers.

We have decided to give special focus to regions like Mpumalanga to enable the creation of new industries, new economic opportunities and sustainable jobs.

And in the past year, we have increased the financing pledges for our Just Energy Transition Investment Plan from around R170 billion to almost R240 billion.

To address the persistent effects of global warming, which manifest themselves through persistent floods, fires and droughts, we have decided to establish a Climate Change Response Fund.

This will bring together all spheres of government and the private sector in a collaborative effort to build our resilience and respond to the impacts of climate change.

To deal with severe inefficiencies in our freight logistics system, we are taking action to improve our ports and rail network and restore them to world-class standards.

We have set out a clear roadmap to stabilise the performance of Transnet and reform our logistics system.

Working closely with business and labour, we have established dedicated teams to turn around five strategic corridors that transport goods for export purposes.

The number of ships waiting to berth at the Port of Durban – which has experienced severe congestion in recent months – has reduced from more than 60 ships in mid-November to just 12 ships at the end of January.

Transnet has appointed an international terminal operator to help expand and improve its largest terminal at the Port of Durban.

And we are overhauling the freight rail system by allowing private rail operators to access the rail network.

With the current conflict in the Middle East affecting shipping traffic through the Suez Canal, South Africa is well positioned to offer bunkering services for ships that will be rerouted via our shores.

We completed the auction of broadband spectrum after more than a decade of delays, resulting in new investment, lower data costs and improved network reach and quality.

These reforms have a profound impact in a society in which access to the internet has risen dramatically over the last decade.

Less than half of all households had internet access in 2011, compared to 79 percent of households in 2022.

Just this week, we published new regulations to reform our visa system, which will make it easier to attract the skills that our economy needs and create a dynamic ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship.

We raised R1.5 trillion in new investment commitments through five South Africa Investment Conferences, of which over R500 billion has already flowed into the economy.

To support growth in the mining sector, we are moving ahead with the modernisation of our mining rights licensing system and are launching an exploration fund to support emerging miners and exploit new mineral deposits.

Through this, mining, which was the bedrock on which the South African economy was built, will once again become a sunrise industry.

Participation of previously disadvantaged black people is increasing.

Black ownership stands at approximately 39 percent when compared with 2 percent in 2004.

Investment in infrastructure is gaining momentum.

New and innovative funding mechanisms will be utilised to increase construction of infrastructure. The Department of Water and Sanitation aims to enhance water resource management by initiating infrastructure projects to secure water supply and diversifying water sources to reduce dependence on surface water.

Bulk water projects are under construction across the country to improve water supply to millions of residents in villages, towns and cities.

The following water infrastructure projects are in progress or completed:

Lesotho Highlands Water Project, Umzimvubu, Hazelmere Dam, uMkhomazi Water Project, Clanwilliam Dam, Tzaneen Dam, Loskop, Mandlakazi, pipeline from Jozini Dam, Giyani, pipeline from Nandoni Dam to Nsami Dam, Pilanesberg Water, Vaal Gamagara and pipeline from the Vaal River to Hothazel.

In the Eastern Cape, the Msikaba and Mtentu bridges are beginning to rise over the landscape, and will be among the highest in Africa once complete.

The steel used for part of the project is fabricated in Mpumalanga, and the iron ore comes from the Northern Cape.

In the past five years, SANRAL, which manages nearly 25,000 km of roads, has awarded more than 1,200 projects to the value of R120 billion.

In November last year, Cabinet approved a framework for high-speed rail, focusing initially on the Johannesburg to Durban corridor.

As we grow the economy, we are making it more inclusive.

Through redistribution, around 25 percent of farmland in our country is now owned black South Africans, bringing us closer to achieving our target of 30 percent by 2030.

In the last 5 years, we have supported around 1,000 black industrialists with funding and other forms of support. These black-owned firms employ more than 90,000 workers and contribute many billions of rands to our economy.

At the same time, about 200,000 more workers obtained ownership of shares in the companies they work, bringing the total worker ownership in companies in the South African economy to well over half a million workers.

We see this trend continuing to grow as more and more companies realise that it is beneficial to their operation that their workers should have a stake in the businesses they work for.

The reforms that we have initiated and the work that is underway will enable us to end load shedding, to improve our logistics system, to achieve water security and ultimately to create jobs.

While our challenges have never been greater, our response to these challenges will lead us to greater prosperity than we have ever known.

One of the worst injustices of apartheid was the manner in which education was used as a tool to perpetuate inequality.

Over the last 30 years, we have sought to use education as a tool to create equality.

Our basic education outcomes are steadily improving across a range of measures.

The latest matric pass rate, at 82.9%, is the highest ever.

And with each new year, learners from no-fee schools are accounting for more and more of the bachelor passes achieved.

At the same time, fewer learners are dropping out of school.

We have increased funding for poor and working-class students in universities and TVET significantly over the past five years.

Over the next five years, we will focus our attention on expanding access to early childhood development and improving early grade reading, where we are already beginning to see progress.

Moving early childhood development to the Department of Basic Education was one of the most important decisions as we were now able to devote more resources to early childhood development and ensure that through cooperative governance various departments of government get involved in early childhood development augmented by the Department of Basic education.

Our policies and programmes have, over the course of 30 years, lifted millions of people out of dire poverty.

Today, fewer South Africans go hungry and fewer live in poverty.

In 1993, South Africa faced a significant poverty challenge, with 71.1 percent of its population living in poverty.

However, under the democratic government, there has been a consistent decline in these numbers.

By 2010, the poverty rate had dropped to 60.9 percent, and it continued to decrease, reaching 55.5 percent in 2020, as reported by the World Bank.

This progress has been made possible by extensive support to those in society who need it most.

Five years ago, we introduced a further measure to tackle poverty in by introducing National Minimum Wage is envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

The decision by key role players, being business and labour and communities, to introduce the minimum wage immediately raised the wages of over 6 million workers.

In the midst of the pandemic, we introduced the special SRD Grant, which currently reaches some 9 million unemployed people every month. We have seen the benefits of this grant and will extend it and improve it as the next step towards income support for the unemployed.

These grants and subsidies do much more than give people what they need to live.

They are an investment in the future.

Social assistance has been shown to increase school enrolment and attendance, lower drop-out rates, and improve the pass rate.

South Africans are living longer than ever before.

Life expectancy has increased from 54 years in 2003 to 65 years in 2023.

Maternal and infant deaths have declined dramatically.

We have built more hospitals and clinics, especially in poor areas, providing better quality care to more South Africans.

Today, 95% of persons diagnosed with HIV know their status, 79% of those receive antiretroviral treatment, and 93% of those are virally suppressed.

New HIV infections among young people have declined significantly.

And yet, while our health system has had a great impact on people's lives, we are working to improve both the quality of healthcare and equality of access.

The National Health Insurance will provide free health care at the point of care for all South Africans, whether in public or private health facilities.

We plan to incrementally implement the NHI, dealing with issues like health system financing, the health workforce, medical products, vaccines and technologies, and health information systems.

One of the most visible, impactful and meaningful achievements in the first three decades of freedom has been in providing homes to the people.

Today, nearly nine out of every ten households live in a formal dwelling.

Where there were once shacks and mud houses, there are now homes of brick and mortar.

These are homes with water to drink and to wash with, homes with electricity for lighting and cooking.

At the end of apartheid, only 6 out of 10 people had access to clean drinking water. Today, that figure has increased to nearly 9 out of 10 South Africans.

We are working to ensure that subsidised housing is located close to work, education and services.

But for services to be delivered, local government has to work.

Too many municipalities are failing on governance, financial and service delivery measures. These constraints affect every aspect of peoples' daily lives.

We have started the implementation of a number of measures to address this problem by providing support to local government, including professionalising the civil service and ensuring that people with the right skills are appointed to key positions.

The Presidency, National Treasury and COGTA are working together to enhance technical capacity in local government and to improve planning, coordination and fiscal oversight.

Through the Presidential Izimbizo that have been held across the country, we have seen how the District Development Model has brought together all spheres of government and key stakeholders to address the service delivery challenges in communities.

The District Development Model has proven to be an effective instrument to enhance cooperative governance and collaboration. We will continue to broaden and deepen this process.

Tackling crime and insecurity is a key priority.

South Africans deserve to be safe and to feel safe, to walk freely and without fear in their neighbourhoods and public spaces.

During this administration, we have focused on equipping our law enforcement agencies, which had been systematically weakened, to do their work effectively.

We have strengthened the ranks of the police through the recruitment of 20,000 police officers over the last two years and another 10,000 in the year to come.

An extra 5,000 police officers have been deployed to Public Order Policing.

The SAPS has launched Operation Shanela as a new approach to target crime hotspots, which resulted in over 285,000 arrests since May last year.

The Economic Infrastructure Task Teams that are operational in all provinces have had important successes in combatting cable theft, damage to critical infrastructure and illegal mining.

Through close collaboration with the private sector, we have seen a reduction in security incidents on the rail network.

We launched the new Border Management Authority last year to improve the security of our borders, and have already stopped over 100,000 people who tried to enter our country illegally.

Together with civil society, we developed the National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence, together with civil society, as a society wide response to this pandemic.

Around R21 billion was dedicated over the medium term to the implementation of the six pillars of the plan, including the economic empowerment of women.

New laws were introduced to strengthen the response of the criminal justice system gender-based violence and provide better support to survivors of such violence.

Our ultimate goal is to end gender-based violence altogether by mobilising all of society. As part of this, we support the call for a pledge that men in South Africa are invited to take to demonstrate their personal commitment to ending this scourge.

Women are also in the process of developing their own pledge.

We still have a long way to go to build safer communities, prevent violent crime, and protect our infrastructure.

But there is no doubt that a professional, well-trained and properly resourced police force, working closely with communities, will make our country a safer place.

Today, every South African can hold their heads high, confident that we have assumed our rightful place on the world stage.

We remain committed to playing a constructive role on our continent and around the globe for the realisation of a better Africa and a better world.

We will continue to play an important role to silence the guns throughout our continent.

Our engagements with parties in the Russia-Ukraine conflict through the Africa Peace Initiative are progressing. We engage in these peace efforts because we believe that even the most intractable conflicts can be brought to an end through negotiations.

Guided by the fundamental principle of human rights and freedom, we have taken up the Palestinian cause to prevent further deaths and destruction in Gaza.

We have welcomed the ruling of the International Court of Justice that Israel must take all measures within its power to prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians.

We condemn the killing of civilians on all sides and call on all parties involved in the conflict to commit to a peace process that will deliver a two state solution.

We will use our foreign policy to pursue our development goals. During our leadership of BRICS last year, we witnessed a new chapter for the BRICS family of countries.

The expansion of the group from five to ten members presents opportunities for trade and a strengthening of political and diplomatic ties between countries in the global South.

We will build on the progress we have made in establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, which will transform South Africa's economy and that of the continent by creating new jobs and increasing economic participation.

And we will place Africa's development at the top of the agenda when we host the G20 in 2025.

The achievements over the last three decades are a testament to the power of collaboration and partnership to address our most pressing challenges.

Our country has a vibrant civil society, a powerful union movement and an engaged private sector.

Over the last five years, we have worked with these social partners to address challenges such as to keep people safe and to distribute vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to mobilise a society-wide response to gender-based violence.

In the past year, we have come together with social partners to end loadshedding, address the challenges in the logistics sector, tackle crime and corruption, and accelerate job creation.

This is the South African way of building a social compact working together on tangible issues, and it will be the key to building a new society in the years to come.

Fellow South Africans,

This is the last State of the Nation Address of the 6th democratic administration.

The last five years has been a time of recovery, rebuilding and renewal.

We have had to revitalise our economy after more than a decade of poor economic performance.

We have had to rebuild our public institutions after the era of state capture.

We have had to recover from a devastating global pandemic that caused great misery and hardship, that closed businesses and cost jobs.

And we have had to confront and overcome a debilitating electricity crisis that, despite significant improvement in recent months, continues to hold back our economy.

We have come a long way in the last five years. We have built on the achievements of the last three decades and we have taken decisive measures to address the immediate challenges facing South Africans.

We have restored the independence and capability of our law enforcement agencies to tackle corruption and crime.

We have worked to advance the rights of persons with disability. We took great pride in making South African Sign Language the 12th official language of our country.

We have safeguarded and promoted the basic rights in our constitution, such as freedom of speech, association and belief. We have defended media freedom and the independence of the judiciary.

We have protected and advanced the rights of members of the LGBTQI community, and continue to combat all forms of prejudice and intolerance.

We have made significant progress on measures to grow the economy, create jobs and reduce poverty.

While we have set in motion the process of renewal and reform, there is more work to be done to see these reforms through to the end.

We will see through the work underway with our partners to end load-shedding and revive the performance of our ports and rail network.

We will continue to strengthen our law enforcement institutions, tackle gender-based violence and fight corruption to make South Africa a safe place for all.

We will continue to strengthen local government, professionalise the public service and ensure that public officials are held accountable for their actions.

We will continue to position our economy to grow and compete in a fast-changing world, to support small businesses, to give young people economic opportunities and to provide social protection to the vulnerable.

We will continue the work to improve the country's fiscal position and hold firm to a sound macroeconomic trajectory.

We will use the opportunities provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area to increase our trade and expand our industries.

We will continue to build an inclusive economy, focusing on the empowerment of black and women South Africans, advancing workers' rights, intensifying land reform and pursuing a just energy transition that leaves no-one behind.

Fellow South Africans,

As we celebrate 30 years of freedom, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to our constitutional democracy and its promise of a better life.

We should not give in to those who resist the responsibility that the Constitution places on us all to correct the injustices of the past and fundamentally transform our economy and society.

We must remind these people of the obligation that the Constitution places on the state to progressively realise the rights of everyone to housing, health care, food, water, social security, safety and education.

By the same measure, we should not allow anyone to diminish vital democratic institutions, to denigrate the judiciary or to challenge the constitutional authority of this Parliament.

We should not give in to those who seek to divide our nation, incite violence and undermine our democracy.

As in the past, as in the future, the people of South Africa should stand together against any attempt to reverse the achievements of our democracy.

As the Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, I worked with many great leaders of our country to craft a constitution that truly reflects the will of the South African people.

As President, I see it as my primary duty to defend our Constitution, and to work every day to realise its promise.

As we move forward, let us remember that it is up to us – not anyone else – to determine the future of South Africa.

We are not passive observers of our history.

We are its authors.

We are the builders of this country we call home.

As we look towards the next 30 years of freedom, we must choose the kind of country, and indeed the kind of world, we want to create for ourselves and for our children.

We are committed to a South Africa in which our common identity lies in our recognition of each other's humanity.

We want a country in which every person is free to be exactly who they are, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion.

We want a country in which the same opportunities are available to every child, whether they are born in Sandton, in Mdantsane, in Sekhukhune, in Mitchell's Plain or in Phoenix.

We want a country in which the rule of law applies to everyone, no matter how wealthy they are or what position they hold.

As we continue the journey together to make this vision a reality, we are inspired by democracy's children, by their energy, by their creativity and by their enthusiasm.

We are inspired by the young people who have carried our hopes onto the global stage, from the Springboks to Banyana Banyana, from the heroic Bafana Bafana to Grammy Award winners like Tyla.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of our freedom, we are reminded of the words of President Nelson Mandela, who said that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.

He said:

"I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come.

"But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."

While we have come far, we have a long way still to go.

Like Madiba, we must keep moving, always forward, always onwards, towards the country of our dreams. Always believing that victory is certain.

I thank you.