



the premier

Department of  
the Premier  
FREE STATE PROVINCE

## 2000 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER IW DIREKO

Mr Speaker and Deputy Speaker,  
hon Members of the Executive Council,  
hon Members of the Provincial Legislature,  
people of the Free State and distinguished guests.

As a glaring rainbow stubbornly paints the African blue skies. So glaring and stubborn is the poverty that blights my people, it makes me cry. Poverty, the legacy of apartheid designed to inflict according to colour line. Oh! Rainbow nation, how can we forget as if the past was fine. How can poverty amongst blacks in Qwaqwa and elsewhere be an act of God. Undoing this handwork of yesteryear we are striking that cord. Resolutely, confidently and single-minded we are on track. Accelerating change for a better life for all our people, we are on track. We are on track to accelerating change in the creation of a truly better life for all our people.

We are confident that this Government is responding to the overwhelming support all our people have displayed in the ANC in the past general election.

During this year we will continue to accelerate our efforts to improve the lives of our people, through the implementation of Government programmes that will give concrete meaning to accelerate change.

After five years of democratic rule, we can confidently state that we are on track to overcoming the overbearing legacy of apartheid devastation in our Province.

The June 2<sup>nd</sup> elections demonstrated the spirit of goodwill of the people of the Free State by the peaceful manner in which elections were conducted.

The overwhelming confidence of all our people, especially African people, in the ability of this Government to represent their interests will be repaid through our continued efforts to qualitatively improve the lives of our people.

The goodwill of the people of this Province is the most precious asset we all should cherish and indeed nurture. I am mindful of the reality of the existence of racism, a legacy of apartheid we inherited. We are not going to close our eyes to incidents and activities of racism from any quarter in the Free State.

I want to emphasise that there is no need for any section of our population to feel alienated to the democratisation of our society. All of us have a place in the sun. South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white!

Since the inauguration of this Government in June last year, has been determined to operate and discharge its responsibilities as a collective. Working in a manner that emphasizes collectivity clearly illustrates, on our part, a commitment to the maximum delivery of services to all our people.

We are determined to work in a manner that promotes an integrated approach to how we execute our functions as a Provincial Government. The recent Provincial Strategic Plan endorsed by the Executive Council, is testimony to our unwavering commitment to a co-ordinated and integrated approach to how we conduct our business in this Province.

We sincerely believe that the unity, collective leadership displayed thus far, is the necessary ingredient for the achievement of all the goals we set ourselves in this second term of governance.

Last August in this House, I made reference to our commitment as Government to implement programmes to improve education in our Province. Educational reform is a contentious and much debated issue in South Africa, and the situation in our schools and classrooms elicits much attention in the media, especially due to the low provincial pass rate of 42,1% in the 1999 matric examinations.

Education requires us to have faith and hope, to believe that we can and will make a difference. Education requires us to be agents of change and instruments of progress.

I believe that the partnership between parents, teachers, learners and the Government will empower and capacitate our educational leaders, but above all it will work like good yeast and have a ripple effect so that ultimately our entire education system will be permeated to the benefit of our learners, who after all are our the future and hope of our country.

The Department will have to use this year to set the stage to ensure that all children of school going age are at school and our schools are turned into areas where educating and learning become our supreme activities.

In June last year, I said if stationery and textbooks are not delivered timeously to schools during this academic year heads would roll. I am happy to announce that by the 25 January 2000, all schools had received 90% of their textbooks. The 10% of textbooks outstanding, I have been made to understand that are due to backorders on the reprint of titles and overseas titles.

As far as farm schools are concerned, I wish to express my appreciation to individual farmers who have signed contracts with the Department of Education concerning farm schools on their land.

I take this opportunity, to appeal to the Free State Agricultural Union to rise to the occasion and facilitate the signing of the agreement and urge some of its members who closed schools instead of signing the agreement. We need this partnership to be visible. It is only through partnership that we can make this Province tick.

This is the year of delivery in education. It cannot and would not be business as usual that our Province is at the bottom rung when it comes to matriculation results. Those who do not perform must know - I repeat they must know that there is no place for them in the system!

Mr Speaker and hon Members, during the International Year of Older Persons in August last year, we committed ourselves to improving the conditions of pensioners as part of restoring the dignity of our people as well as making good our determination to better the quality of lives of our people.

An audit of all pension pay-points has been concluded. This brought to light the poor conditions under which pensioners receive their grants. Some of these facilities have no basic infrastructure such as toilets, clean water and electricity. Up to 90% of pay-points are overcrowded, some having to serve over 14 000 beneficiaries paid-out at one point.

We have engaged the local authorities in the decentralisation of these pay-points, and some local authorities have responded positively. It is in this spirit of co-operative governance that we urge the co-operation of all local authorities in this Province to honour our pensioners on the pay-day.

The decline of the moral fibre in society is a concern for Government. We are experiencing increasing incidents of rape, child and women abuse. These attacks bear testimony to a declining moral fibre of society. The Life Skills Education Programme has been developed to address this challenge. This policy is aimed at the restoration and rebuilding of social values. The programme is targeted at children, youth, women and parents.

The plight of children continues to be our priority as the Government. To this effect the province will be establishing a One Stop Youth Justice Centre, the first of its kind in the country, for youth in conflict with the law.

This centre will provide young people in conflict with the law with the following services, reception, assessment and referral; and this service will be provided in partnership with all stakeholders in the criminal justice system. The MEC for Social Welfare will elaborate more on these programmes on the occasion of her budget speech in this hon House.

We outlined to this hon House the difficulties of eradicating the legacy of poverty in rural areas in of our Province. To this effect, the Free State has completed both the comprehensive poverty eradication and integrated rural development strategies. The reality of poverty in the Free State is that there is a significant correlation between poverty and race. The white household income in 1995 was R60 000 per annum, compared to R12 400 for African households.

Rural areas are poorer. The household income in rural areas was R10 300 per annum in 1995. In income terms the incidence of poverty is very high in the Free State, it is 63,4%, rising to 88% in Qwaqwa. Unemployment rates are very high, and wage levels very low, partly reflecting the high proportion of labour employed in the agricultural sector where wages are typically low. On the whole, conditions in our rural communities deserve our explicit bias and concentration in the process of improving the quality of life for our people.

Certainly, we shoulder an overriding moral obligation to ensure the alleviation of poverty for the majority of the people in this Province. To facilitate an integrated approach to poverty alleviation, the integrated rural development strategy is absolutely essential. This strategy essentially aims at promoting the productivity of commercial agriculture and of industries and commerce in small towns, and stimulating rural development by mobilising a range of Government departments and non-governmental institutions to work together. The respective hon MEC's for Social Welfare and Agriculture will elaborate on these programmes at a later stage in this House.

I am pleased to announce that the province has accessed funds from the Social Plan Fund, which is aimed at improving municipalities that have been affected by large-scale job losses. The first towns to qualify for this plan are Virginia, Henneman and Odendaalrus. Our

Province has been allocated an amount of R3 million from the Local Economic Development Fund as part of our poverty alleviation strategy.

The intensification of government efforts to eradicate the scourge of HIV/Aids will only be successful if we work in close partnerships with key stakeholders. In our Partnership against HIV/Aids, and as we announced last year, the Government is hosting a conference on HIV/Aids on the 26-27 February 2000. As Government we remain committed to ensuring that public education campaigns do have an impact, particularly that of changing behaviour patterns of all our people.

I am pleased to announce that at this Provincial Aids Conference we will announce the names of members of the Provincial Aids Council. The men and women, youth and old, disabled, rural and urban people will give meaning to the partnerships we are forging in the fight against this merciless disease.

These people will champion our struggle against HIV/Aids. They will ensure, together with all citizens of the province, that we give hope to those affected by HIV/Aids, to those living with the disease and to the orphans they will show our love, compassion and support.

In recognition of their responsibility in this area, the Youth Commission together with the Young Positive Living Ambassadors have initiated an HIV/Aids awareness programme for the youth across the province.

During this year we pay particular attention to the challenge of job creation. Consistent with decisions made by Government, the public and private sectors have accepted the responsibility of working in partnership with one another with regard to job creation.

The decline in the gold industry has exacerbated the unacceptably high levels of unemployment in our Province, and further sharpened the huge levels of poverty prevalent in many of our communities.

Local government is thus challenged along with other spheres of Government; and in partnership with the private sector, non-governmental organisations and community based organisations to vigorously promote local economic development. It also goes without saying that co-operation between and among municipalities will maximise their impact on socio-economic development.

In cooperation with National Government, projects in Botshabelo, Virginia, Harrismith and Welkom have been approved and funded to the tune of R3,1 million for local economic development. These projects were chosen for their focus on poverty alleviation, job creation and sustainability.

We call upon all key stakeholders, local residents, businesses and political parties including traditional leaders to co-operate in stamping out the crisis some of the TLC's are facing. We are confident that the changes that are being introduced led by the demarcation of new boundaries will have positive impact on our people.

I am pleased to announce that the Executive Council of the Free State has decided to revive PROVLOC, which is a structure that is intended to be a platform for regular contact between Provincial and local government. It will help us enormously in dealing with the challenges facing us at local government level. The revised structure seeks to improve inter-

governmental relations by increasing coordination, cooperation and the tackling of priorities collectively.

The Free State, Welkom in particular, was granted the opportunity to stage the World Motorcycle Grand Prix, which is the only Grand Prix in Africa.

The Phakisa project is one of the important flagship programmes of Government aimed at stimulating economic development and job creation through sport **tourism**. Since Phakisa is a flagship programme, I would like to encourage and invite the private sector to become partners in sport **tourism** in the Free State, and the economic regeneration of the Goldfields in particular.

The Maluti Drakensberg Development Project, which constitutes our partnership with international investors, will soon be taking off the ground. This is our major **tourism** initiative that will accelerate infrastructure and **tourism** development in the Eastern Free State and provide the region with jobs.

In addition, R 46 million is to be invested in the upgrading and extension of the Setsing Shopping Centre Development in Qwaqwa. On completion, this project will apart from servicing the majority of the Qwaqwa population, create in excess of 400 job opportunities.

Very recently we have started a project of women in construction in the province. This project, a partnership of a multitude of sectors, Government, business and the non-governmental organisations, assembled a group of hundred women, the majority of whom are from rural areas to be trained in construction and related businesses. They are trained in various aspects of building, carpentry and draughting.

I am certain that you will agree with me that this is a concrete empowerment of women, through job creation and the provision of life skills for women. I wish to take this opportunity to emphasize the importance and urgency we attach to job creation.

Similarly, we are encouraged by the accelerated development of women farmers in our Province. This year the Free State will participate in the Woman Farmer of the Year Competition. It is gratifying to observe that women are now vigorously participating in activities, which were previously considered as the exclusive male domain.

I make a call today that emerging farmers in this Province cannot succeed without the help of the commercial farmers. We congratulate the Milk Producers Organisation for the help they have been providing to emerging farmers through funding and capacity building so as to develop into commercial farmers. That type of support will go a very long way in alleviating conditions on the farms and the people in general in the disadvantaged areas of Qwaqwa and Thaba Nchu.

In the context of partnership, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all stakeholders who made it possible for our Y2K roll-over to be smooth and professionally managed by our Province. We thank all those involved, particularly public servants who sacrificed their time to ensure that we experienced no major problems in the transition period.

All our citizens need to be secure in the knowledge that as Government we have made immeasurable strides in our fight against crime. We have strengthened our institutional mechanisms to deal with crime, in particular against the heinous crime of violence against women and children.

Government is on track in efforts to contain crime through an intelligence led and reliable crime prevention strategy in partnership with business, local authorities and all citizens of the province. Whereas our communities have displayed the willingness to work with the Police Service, we remain concerned by the reports continuously raised regarding bad treatment based on racist attitudes and practices by members of the SAPS toward ordinary people. As indicated, the essential transformation of this service to put *Batho Pele* simply means that we have to weed out all forms of racism and corruption that exist in the South African Police Service.

How is it possible that Government can lose so much property through theft and corruption? We can only but reach one conclusion, rogue and corrupt elements in our public service, working with other corrupt security officials are hell bent on sabotaging Government efforts in crime prevention.

In Government's determination to weed out corrupt elements within the public service, including those collaborating with people from outside the service, I am confidently and certainly inform you all that arrests are imminent.

You can rest assured that we shall be merciless in dealing with corrupt people as we discover them! However, I must hasten to acknowledge that there are good officers both in the police and even in the public service who put the interest of their people first and in conjunction with those communities they so proudly served, we encourage them to expose corruption wherever it exist.

In a few months we will be holding our second government elections. Our leaders at the local government level are faced with the objective problems of skewed budgeting and infrastructure backlogs. In rural areas in particular, local government leaders confront unresolved poverty levels and lack of development. The fact that these problems are often accompanied by instances of weak management, lack of accountability, self-enrichment and ivory tower mentalities compound our problems.

We urge all in the public service to render their support as they did during the national elections to ensure the success of the forthcoming local government elections.

Hon Members, despite the setback of the increased carnage on our roads over festive season and the budgetary constraints we are still on track to achieve a minimum 10% reduction of road accidents in the province. However, all of us we will have to support this initiative.

In pursuit of all this, we will operate in collaboration with TLC's and the National Department because the experience of Arrive Alive has taught us that such a partnership can deliver. Recently our road infrastructure has deteriorated at a fast rate, and the recent rainfalls, welcome as they are, have compounded the problem further. This problem affects all of us - farmers, rural and urban areas as well as the business community.

We have decided to establish a Road Infrastructure Fund whose immediate concern is to attend to the Ficksburg-Clocolan, and Welkom-Odendaalsrus roads and all the secondary roads in the province.

As part of our commitment to the re-structuring of state assets, I am pleased to announce that the Maluti Bus tender will go out for public tender later this month. We hope that the restructured Maluti Bus Service will bring an improvement in the lives of our people in Qwaqwa and the Eastern Free State in general, by increasing their ability to access services

and providing transport to tourists as well. This would further demonstrate our intention to pursue the public-private partnerships necessary to ensure maximum delivery of services.

We wish to re-iterate what we said at the opening of the Legislature in August of last year. Corruption of whatever form in the public service will be dealt with mercilessly. The arrest, jailing and suspensions of corrupt public servants bears testimony to the statement that we have adopted a zero tolerance approach to corruption.

Hon Members of the Executive Council will in due course elaborate on the programmes essential to the fulfillment of our mandate to the people of this Province.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate hon Members of the Executive Council and the Legislature for the tireless work they have done in the last seven months, and indeed say that we would not have expected any less from all of them.

Mr Speaker and hon Members, we are on track! We are on track to ensuring that we build a unified Free State Province with a vibrant economy, providing for sustainable growth and development of all our people. We are on track to providing the leadership that makes sure that everyone has a role, everyone has an assignment and that the assignment agreed upon will get the job done!

We are on track in ensuring that we are in constant contact with our people! This will be achieved through, amongst other things, the rotation of the Executive Council meetings in the various areas of the province to ensure effective constituency work among all sectors of our communities whether they be black, white or green.

We are on track to an era of the African Century that declares war on mediocrity in how we do our work. We are on track to accelerate the pace of delivery. Backward never, forward ever!