



2003 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER IW DIREKO

Mr Speaker, Members of the Legislature, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the second term of governance marks the coming of age of the Free State, both for the people and indeed for Government itself. The people look up to us with high expectations and correctly so. The Government on the other hand is faced with the daunting task of delivery of public services to alleviate poverty among the majority of our people and to create much needed jobs.

Initially, the efforts of Government were hampered by a lack of experience in management and governance, because black people were previously barred from participation in government. By the turn of the second term of the provincial administration, we had certainly grown in stature and are more than ready to discharge the mandate of the majority of our people to unite in action in pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

Consequently, today marks the beginning of the last lap towards the finishing line of our second term, which in turn ushers in the first decade of our democracy. For this reason, it becomes crucial for us to provide an adequate report card to the people of this Province. Correctly anticipating that we would reach this stage of our governance, in 2001 we introduced the three-year Free State Development Plan to help us effectively deal with the reconstruction and development of the lives of our people. This is our master plan as we build a united and prosperous Free State that will fulfil the needs of all its people.

The big question, therefore, is how we have performed against what we set out to do. It is with a special sense of fulfilment and pride that today we assure the people of the Free State that the ever-elusive prudent financial management has been attained. This is evidenced by the reduction of qualified audit opinions from four to two in the previous financial year.

The feedback we received from and the public pronouncement by the Provincial Public Accounts Committee of this House, indicates beyond any doubt that the governance of the Free State Provincial Government has come of age and can be compared with the best elsewhere in this country.

The 70.7% matric pass rate for 2002 is not only higher than the target of 60.4%, but even surpassed the 2005 target of 65.5%. It is particularly gratifying to note the steady improvement against the national average - from 6% below the national average in 1999 to 3% above the national average. We have also declared that never again shall our pass rate be below the national average.

Our commitment to the provision of adequate primary health care services through our Clinic Building and Upgrading Programme has ensured that four new clinics have been built and nine others have been upgraded throughout the Free State. Our Hospital Revitalisation Programme has resulted in nine hospitals, namely:

- Pelonomi, National, Universitas, and Moroka in Mangaung;
- Ladybrand in Mantsopa;

- Harrismith, Elizabeth Ross and Manapo in Maluti-a-Phofung;
- Boitumelo in Moqhaka; and
- Virginia in Matjhabeng being upgraded.

Concerned with the high incidence of poverty in the Province, we have and continue to broaden the social safety net in the Free State. To this end, we have issued 5 000 food parcels to the poor people of the Free State, and registered 137 864 children for child support grants. All in all we have 322 364 beneficiaries who receive their pensions at 177 pay stations throughout the Free State. This is an increase of 137 105 beneficiaries after the cleaning up of the social security database.

Our people's response to the President's call for *Letsema* is commendable. People from different backgrounds generously volunteered their time and services towards building a unified and prosperous Free State. More than 1000 volunteers currently give care to the sick and frail throughout the Province. More than 9 000 volunteers joined forces with the police in different roles, from painting police stations to joining local Community Police Fora. A huge number of our people descended on the Charles Mopeli Stadium on 25 January to volunteer their time to assist in registering applicants for child support grants and identification documents. We are humbled by this warm gesture.

On the local government front, all 25 municipalities have finalised their integrated development plans, and their alignment to the Free State Development Plan is underway. Provision of clean water has been remarkable. A total of 371 651 households have had metered connections installed, while 113 417 households were provided with un-metered connections, and 94 760 households have standpipes installed. We are also delighted to announce that out of 1 970 032 households in the Free State, 890 032 receive free basic services.

The launch of the Moral Regeneration Movement in the Free State was another milestone in the building of a new and better Free State. The Free State was the first province to launch the provincial chapter in collaboration with NGO's (non-governmental organisations), CBO's (community-based organisations) and faith-based organisations.

Driven by the spirit of a community that cares and protects the vulnerable, the Inter-sectoral Victim Empowerment Programme Forum was formed to co-ordinate services to victims of violence and abuse. This resulted in 24-hour victim support services being provided in all districts, targeting mainly women and children who are victims of abuse. These include the Tshepong Crisis Centre in Mangaung, the Kopano Victim Support Centre in Lejweleputswa and the Philani Victim Support Centre in Trompsburg. Twenty-one other victim support centres were established at different police stations throughout the Free State.

After careful consideration of how youth affairs were handled, the Free State Youth Commission was converted into a fully-fledged public entity on 1 April 2002. The administrative and legislative space created by this move assisted in lending impetus in matters affecting young people of the Free State. The creation, among others, of the Youth Research Unit, in collaboration with the University of the Free State, and the erection and unveiling of the Youth Martyrs Memorial Stone on 16 June 2002 in Bloemfontein, demonstrates the capabilities of our young people when given space and reason for independence.

Once more, the Mangaung Cultural Festival, popularly known as Macufe, continues to grow in stature. The ten day cultural festival saw 5 276 artists, of which 86% were from the Free

State, performing before a collective audience of 52 326. This is a welcomed economic boost for Bloemfontein.

The centrality of the Free State poses unwelcome difficulties in respect of traffic safety and control. Be that as it may, our strategies in this regard are beginning to deliver. Despite the increase of around 25% of road fatalities during the festive period, the Free State registered a decrease of 12%. We hope that this is the beginning of good times on our roads all year round.

The Free State Government continues to make significant progress on land reform and agricultural development. As at the end of December 2002, 236 agricultural projects, settling new emerging farmers – predominantly black - on 69 077 hectares of land, were completed. A total of R54.7 million worth of state grants were issued to 1 552 beneficiaries throughout the Province.

This, by any standard, is a record to be proud of. These achievements are made possible by sheer hard work and dedication demonstrated by men and women who took up the national call to unite in action, as we push back the frontiers of poverty. I therefore use this platform to call upon all the people of the Free State to partner this Government as we create a cadre of public servants with renewed patriotism to build a new and a better Free State. That is our goal.

Our challenge in the months ahead is how we can turn the economy of the Province around, so that we can continue to create enough jobs for our people. For us to succeed, our plans and strategies should reflect new realities. The economy of this Province is driven by secondary and tertiary sectors like finance, real estate and business services and manufacturing. This is due to a significant decline in primary sectors like agriculture and mining.

Poverty alleviation remains at the core of this Government's programme of action. Guided by the unity of our purpose, we declare a total onslaught against poverty and underdevelopment, specifically in our rural areas.

Our chance to deal effectively with these issues is drastically improved as we once again turn to the Free State Development Plan. This plan remains our bible which guides us as we unveil the caring and unified nature of this Government towards the people who put it in power to ensure that it fulfils their needs.

Our call, as the Free State Provincial Government, is to discharge the public mandate the overwhelming majority of the people of this country gave to the ruling ANC. Our challenge, therefore, is to ensure that this mandate is also understood and carried out by the 59 000 public servants employed by this Government. We need to assure our people that we are succeeding in building an efficient public service that is sensitive to the needs of the majority of the people we serve.

Our starting point is to include, as part of each Government department's programme of action, an effective diversity management plan. Our plans and programmes should reflect a clear programme in respect of the emancipation of women, development of youth, as well as the empowerment of people with disabilities.

To address this and other related matters, we have undertaken to beef up our Human Resources Development Strategy. This strategy will have at its core the Free State Training

Institute. I am proud to announce that it has already commenced with its operations. This institute has received support from the international community, with amongst others the USA (United States of America), Canada and France having already committed themselves to joining the people of the Free State in making a success out of it. We therefore invite all the people of the Free State to join us when we officially launch this important institute on 22 April 2003 at the official opening on Public Service Day.

Responding to the national call of public accountability and bringing the Government closer to the people, we have committed the Executive Council to regular interaction with the public of the Free State through the EXCO (Executive Committee) Meets the People Campaign, PROVLOC (Provincial and Local Government) and the Mayors' Forum. These interventions continue to be an important source of information and inspiration to this Government.

I call upon the people of the Free State from different formations to support this interaction, because it is through this interaction that service delivery can be enhanced and public accountability guaranteed. The completion this year of the Multi-Purpose Community Centres in Zastron and Trompsburg will improve this community interaction tremendously.

In support of this principle, this Government is committed to ensuring integrated and focused service delivery in the Free State through the clusters of the MECs. Central to this commitment is the improvement of the way Government engages its stakeholders and the community in policy and decision-making, so that knowledge, wisdom and practical experience of the community sector contribute fully to policy decisions and service delivery.

Our efforts to build a new and better Free State depend largely on how and to what extent we capacitate our municipalities. This process calls upon us to safeguard the following important tenets:

- Deepening democracy through an effective ward committee system;
- Building a sustainable local government able to meet the needs of the communities;
- Financial sustainability of municipalities through effective revenue collection strategies;
- Completion, alignment and evaluation of Integrated Development Plans (IDP's); and
- Accelerating local economic development to create much needed jobs for our people.

The Local Governance Unit to be established in April this year, in partnership with SALGA and the University of the Free State, will help in building capacity among councillors and managers in municipalities.

We are truly heartened by the fact that there are municipalities who, driven by these principles, made considerable improvement from the hopeless situation they were in a few months ago. These include Letsemeng, Tswelopele and Maluti-a-Phofung municipalities.

Collectively, as at August 2002, local government in the Free State is owed R2.2 billion in unpaid accounts. This can no longer be allowed to go on, as it impedes the progress of municipalities. In the true spirit of *Masakhane*, all municipalities will be expected to implement strict credit control measures, as well as an Indigents Assistance Policy. No individual and institution that is able to pay will be let off. The party is over! The Department of Local Government and Housing will assist in building the required capacity within municipalities to eradicate this problem.

In our effort to provide appropriate support to our traditional leaders, the House of Traditional Leaders was transferred to the Department of Local Government and Housing. Subsequently the White Paper on Traditional Leaders has been tabled before the Executive Council and the process of soliciting inputs is underway.

We appeal to our kings and the community in general to make sure that the views of the majority of Free State citizens are respected in all respects in this document, which is in the interest of the future king's governance.

We continue to build and maintain good intergovernmental relations with our partners around the world. Due to effective structured and targeted international missions, 16 out of 22 project proposals submitted to our Belgian counterparts have been approved and will be funded to the tune of R40 million. Our twinning arrangement with Canada makes us the biggest beneficiary of administrative and technical support from the Canadians in this country.

Urgent and vigorous transformation of our economy is inevitable. According to Statistics South Africa, our economic growth is the second lowest at -0.6%. Whilst we may want to contest these findings, we know that our plans and strategies were hitherto based on the premise that our economy is dependant on primary sectors such as agriculture and mining. This, according to the latest survey, is no longer the case. Secondary and tertiary industries are now the biggest contributors to the Provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

*The critical test, therefore, is whether our plans and strategies reflect this new reality. With a 34% unemployment rate, the need to turn the tide cannot be overemphasized. This, however, should be viewed against the understanding that the supply of labour is directly linked to the supply of appropriate skills, as modern production methods increasingly make use of technologies requiring skills for effective operations.

#What we are told is that the implication is that investment flow will increasingly follow the flow of skills, because without the necessary skills, capital equipment will be used less effectively. Our challenge is how to deal with this dichotomy.

Talking about investment flows: We continue to give urgent attention to areas in the southern Free State. Welcome news to an otherwise economically depressed area, is the R60 million private game lodge development, funded jointly by the IDC (Industrial Development Corporation) and DBSA (Development Bank of South Africa) between Smithfield and Bethulie. This and other ventures are still in the planning stage, but are an indication of the commitment of this Government and its partners to development in the southern parts of the Free State.

It will be remiss of me not to spend a few minutes talking about state tenders, now that we are talking about economic transformation. Our efforts to have a clean government are often bedevilled by people's personal interest in tenders. For this reason, the State Procurement System has been transformed. The erstwhile State Tender Board has since been abolished and replaced by the Central Procurement Committee. The benefit from this exercise is faster adjudication and approval of tenders and procurement being kept within the budget. We have to instil within and among ourselves the most responsible way of dealing with state resources. There is no amount of persuasion that will convince me that it is correct for Government officials, both executive and administrative, and councillors to unfairly benefit from state tenders in whatever form. This is non-negotiable!

In the interest of improved service delivery, state tenders should be looked at once more. A proper screening system that compliments the compliance process should be considered to minimize losses to the Government due to entrepreneurs who are not able to execute their tender obligations.

The government should be firm on the practice of fronting. We need to be ruthless with those who misrepresent themselves in the name of state tenders. This practice undermines the noble intentions of the Government with black economic empowerment. For all intents and purposes, state tenders should be meant for those who make a meaningful contribution to the economy of this Province and help the state in creating much needed jobs.

Our fight against poverty and underdevelopment is underpinned by the provision of adequate and sustainable infrastructure. Our integrated sustainable rural development and urban renewal programmes are at the centre of this fight. Through these programmes, this Government pools together all available resources, both financial and human, and channel them to the most deserving communities. This was our answer to the needs of the community of Maluti-a-Phofung, specifically in Qwaqwa, where the deepest poverty pockets were found. Our efforts as National, Provincial and Local Governments, delivered a total of 30 developmental and poverty alleviation projects.

Clustered in infrastructural, social and economic development and institutional capacity development projects, these programmes have so far created more than 4 000 jobs, of which about 2 000 are sustainable. The social impact of these projects has been an encouraging one with 31.3% of the total people employed being women and 23.6% being youths. Our hope against this fight is in labour intensive schemes.

The development and provision of decent housing, clean water, access roads, sanitation and electricity should be stepped up. To successfully tackle the provincial housing backlog of 253 262 as at March 2001, we undertake to build 12 000 units per year. We want to reiterate our promise to the people of the Free State that we are making satisfactory progress with our plans to get rid of the bucket system in the Free State. We will work at double the rate with the help of the Department of Water Affairs and other international partners to realise this dream.

*Our road network of 48 728 km throughout the Free State is receiving attention through an elaborate maintenance and rehabilitation programme. Thirteen primary and secondary roads are currently under construction. In an effort to speed up this process, a few arterial roads have been handed over to the National Roads Agency for upgrading and maintenance. These are the Senekal/Paul Roux and Reddersburg/Smithfield roads, and the Theunissen/Virginia and Bloemfontein road, which will be upgraded to N1 status. Work on these roads will start in the new financial year.

These efforts are, however, undermined by the overloading of heavy-duty trucks on our roads. We have introduced zero-tolerance that entails the usage of three additional mobile weighing bridges in areas from Ladybrand to Heilbron and Bethlehem to Lindley and Reitz. This will entail confiscating trucks and the identification of habitual offenders.

The development of the people of the Free State is our answer in building a new and better Free State that fulfils the needs of its people. To this end, we continue to increase the education and skills level of our people. This is evidenced by the 11.7% improvement in our matric pass rate in 2002. As the foundation of our Human Resources Development strategy, the Free State Provincial Government issued 252 bursaries to deserving learners in the Free

State. This will help us build the required skills within the Province in our effort to build a unified and prosperous Free State. To sustain this process, we are rolling out a comprehensive Early Childhood Development and Adult Basic Education & Training (ABET) programme.

Concerned with the welfare and the quality of education of farm school learners, we have introduced the Farm School Project. This project entails accommodating these learners in existing boarding school facilities. The first phase of this project was launched in July 2002 at Olien Secondary School, Fauresmith, and the Xhariep District. Currently two other facilities are operational. These are Tseki Secondary School in Maluti-a-Phofung and Moroka High School in Thaba 'Nchu. Two more facilities are earmarked in Maluti-a-Phofung and Bultfontein.

The provision of adequate health care services to the majority of the people of the Free State is an inspiration to the dedicated health givers in the Province. Our goal, among others, is to reduce the burden of HIV/Aids. This we will do through:

- Building the capacity of and providing funding to NGO's to work in partnership with various provincial departments in the provision of a comprehensive package of interventions, including home based care;
- Expanding voluntary confidential counselling and testing to all primary health care clinics;
- Improving access to social security grants to households affected by and infected with HIV/Aids; and
- Providing post-exposure prophylaxis against HIV for victims of sexual violence.

Let me, at this stage, deal with the recent report by the HSRC (Human Sciences Research Councils) on the household study on HIV/Aids. The casual and sometimes reckless usage and interpretation of statistics is a great source of concern to me. Different studies on the prevalence of HIV/Aids have placed the Free State anywhere between the highest and the fourth highest in South Africa. A matter that I think we, as the Free State Government, need to give attention to. We should, however, avoid the temptation to reduce our people to statistics and figures. The knowledge that a high number of our people are infected and affected is enough to close ranks and be compassionate.

*What we know is that the number of people who are infected by this virus in the Free State is increasing. Our plea is that we should work together. People must take voluntary tests to know their HIV status, so that help can be provided. When we work together, we can win the struggle against HIV/Aids. The fight against HIV/Aids concerns all of us.

*The knowledge that a huge amount of our people are infected and affected by Aids, is enough reason to stand together and show compassion. The struggle against the pandemic is everybody's struggle. Together we can save the world! Everyone can help with his/her small contribution to stop Aids.

The fight against the pandemic is everybody's fight. Together we can save the world - each with his or her little contribution. Aids can be beaten! The Young Positive Living Ambassadors (YPLA) Project, driven by the Youth Commission, continues to give us hope in our fight against this pandemic. The impact analysis study on this programme has motivated us to expand the programme.

The Free State Provincial Government continues to broaden the safety net of the vulnerable people of the Free State. We have allocated resources to enable us to search for and identify our people who, until now, are still not captured on the system. Not a single soul who qualifies for these grants should die of hunger because she/he cannot access Government money that is meant to feed the poor. It becomes the responsibility of all of us, who purport to be leaders in the community, all of us who purport to care for the communities in which we live, to make sure that the people who need to access this money, which is there, should be able to do so. Then you will have carried out your social, as well as Christian, responsibility. It is not the responsibility of Government. It is the responsibility of every one of us.

We are delighted to announce that the ANC Government will phase-in the extension of child support grant from seven to 14 years.

Allow me at this stage, on behalf of all the people of the Free State, to join all the South Africans to celebrate, in the name of African Renaissance, the staging of the ICC (International Cricket Council) Cricket World Cup in South Africa. This is a victory for sport in Africa. The five matches to be played in our Province, with the first one already played on 10 February, are warmly welcomed by all of us. Our goal of promoting mass participation in sport, recreation and cultural activities, and to accelerate performance in sport, will benefit greatly from the event of this magnitude.

As the Proteas take on Bangladesh tomorrow at Goodyear Park, the Free State will be on the centre-stage. We could not have asked for more. The Proteas have the absolute backing of this Province. They will win! They must win! This we hope and trust will boost our young tourism sector immensely.

Good relations between the Police and the community are of critical importance to crime reduction. It is for this reason that we have moved fast in implementing the people-centred Police Service through human rights policing, sector policing and victim empowerment processes. In the best interest of the people of this Province, we continue with the monitoring of police conduct. This morning we give them ten out of ten. [Applause] A community perception survey on the work of the police is currently underway and the final report will be made public after March this year.

Our fight against crime is gaining momentum. We have put extra policing measures in place to fight alcohol and drug abuse among learners, particularly in Mangaung. An amount in excess of R5 million has been committed to the extension of the closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance system in Matjhabeng. This is a warning to criminals wherever they are in the Free State. We say to them: There is no place to hide!

The details of these and other Government programmes will be contained in the respective department's budget vote speeches to commence in this House soon.

In conclusion, I wish to call upon all the people of the Free State to put aside all the differences and work to create a unified and prosperous Free State. Let us draw our inspiration from the words of the then Deputy President in his New Patriotism Address at the University of the Transkei in 1998, when he said:

You and I would agree that the young intellectuals of our country, among them the students at our universities, have a responsibility to ask the question: What do we do with the freedom we have gained to ensure that we build a better society and a country which every South African would be proud to call home?

I wish the Free State Legislature and municipalities all the success in the New Year. Let us all join hands in creating a united and prosperous Free State.
