



the premier

Department of
the Premier
FREE STATE PROVINCE

2007 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER FB MARSHOFF

16 February 2007

Hon Speaker and Deputy Speaker,
hon Members of the Legislature,
hon leaders of our political parties,
the leadership of Salga (South African Local Government Association),
all executive mayors and mayors of our various municipalities,
our honoured traditional leaders,
representatives of the private sector,
representatives of boards, state owned enterprises and public entities, all our social partners,
distinguished guests, friends, comrades and the people of the Free State.

On this occasion of the fourth session of this democratic Legislature, at the celebration of our Government's midterm in office, we can proudly say that, despite challenges and limitations, we live in a non-racial, non-sexist, free and democratic country.

This bold assertion I am making today, hon Speaker, is neither government propaganda nor a figment of my imagination - the people of the Free State themselves confirmed this in several independent surveys that were recently conducted.

The *Sunday Times* of 27 January 2007 states, amongst others, that the Free State is the second most optimistic province and that the middle class has risen by 36%. The study concludes by summing up the views of the people of the Free State as "everything is improving for the better". Another survey cites Bloemfontein - the City of Roses - as being inhabited by the most cheerful folk and as the best place to live in.

Furthermore, hon Speaker, the feedback we received from the Report of the African Peer Review Mechanism confirms that our people are happy with how we deal with issues of democracy and political governance. They are happy with how we manage the economy and how we handle socio-economic programmes.

This occasion comes at a time when our Government closes its yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of the women's march to Pretoria in 1956. Some veterans from that march are present here today and I would like to take this opportunity to salute these path breakers and visionaries.

While this was no doubt an occasion of historic significance, it is important to take this opportunity to acknowledge those who came before us. It was here, in the streets of Bloemfontein, that the women of this Province first flexed their muscles against an oppressive system. I am referring to the underappreciated women's march of 1913, when they protested against the introduction of

the permit system which was not only aimed at locking black women in the Waaihoek location, but also to deprive them of possible participation in economic activity.

The significance of that march goes beyond the symbolic and the heroic actions of those women who, according to Sol Plaatjie, marched into the centre of white Bloemfontein. These women built connections across racial divisions, including the Satyagraha movement of Mahatma Gandhi.

It is a special privilege, hon Speaker, to welcome amongst us the Consul General of India, Mr Shringla, to South Africa. Sir, your presence here today is a strong affirmation of the continued solidarity between our people. The first foundations of that solidarity were laid by our ancestors under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and those who were involved in the Satyagraha Movement and the national liberation struggle. It is a bond that was strongly forged by the common commitment to freedom for humanity.

The people of India came to the South African shores as indentured labour, a system similar to that of slavery. Many of those who finally settled in South Africa were subjected to the diabolic system of apartheid, just like their Coloured and African counterparts. It is true; apartheid had its own grading order, but it is important that we should always remember the indignities we all suffered. However, above all, hon Speaker, we must recommit ourselves to the humanistic vision of our forebears who led us in building unity across the racial divide.

Last night we had an opportunity to view a documentary and photo exhibition on the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi. We were reminded that both the Bhambatha Rebellion and Satyagraha, whose anniversaries we celebrated last year, demonstrate that a people united in their quest for freedom, peace and development can never be defeated.

We also welcome all of our guests from our communities across the Province, who are living monuments and testimonials. They are here to confirm that the vision of a better life for all is indeed realistic and possible.

People's contract to create work and fight poverty

When the people of the Free State voted us into power in 2004, they simultaneously gave us an unambiguous mandate to fight poverty and create a better life for all. This central task is articulated better by President Thabo Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address of 9 February when he reminded us about the contract that the ANC led government had made with the people of South Africa after the election in 2004.

Mandated by the people of the Province, we called on our people in 2004 to join in a people's contract for better a Free State. We echoed this call in 2005, as we observed the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, by rallying all our people to join the popular mobilisation to advance its vision and to build a province that truly belongs to all of us.

Last year we asserted in this House that our people have entered an age of hope and they believe their sacrifices and expectations will not be betrayed. We said so then and continue to state this without any fear of contradiction, because we know that despite numerous challenges, including poverty, unemployment, infrastructure development and crime - to mention but a few -

the Free State Government has steadily put in place building blocks towards the realisation of the full meaning of freedom in socio-economic, political, cultural and many other contexts.

Hon Speaker, in 2004, our Government outlined our priority areas:

- to grow the economy;
- to enhance constitutional rights and governance;
- to extend access to services;
- to tackle crime and corruption;
- to provide a comprehensive social security programme; and
- to broaden sustainable livelihoods.

In this Province we took that as a guide and developed the Free State Growth and Development Strategy (FSGDS). This strategy, which we have just reviewed and aligned with our line functions and departments, remains our broad policy framework and our tool which incorporates and aligns the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of municipalities to ensure an integrated and coordinated approach. It facilitates the implementation of a peoples' contract and provides strategic vision for Government, as well as for all its stakeholders.

Growing an economy to the benefit of all

The Province is on an upward trend which indicates economic growth and improved quality of life. This has been made possible through a robust investment promotion and business development programmes.

Hon Members of this House will be pleased to note that as we move forward, we are encouraged by an analysis of the Free State household survey which the Statistician General recently shared with us based on the urban function index and the spatial development perspective.

In terms of this survey, the unemployment rate has decreased from 35% to 28%. Our economy has grown from 0.1% in 2001 to 4.2% in 2006. Our economic activities are informed by the commitment to create jobs and fight poverty. In order to accelerate economic growth and development we hosted a number of local economic growth and development workshops throughout the Province to guide the initiative of regional industrial development strategies.

We approved the establishment of two bio-fuel plants in Bothaville and Hoopstad. An investment of about R640 million has been committed to the Bothaville plant. A further rollout of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (Asgisa) initiative will be given further impetus when National Cabinet approves the bio-fuel strategy guidelines. A consultative workshop on the draft bio-fuel strategy will be held in Bloemfontein in March to receive inputs on the draft strategy. I invite all stakeholders to make their voices heard.

In addition, phase one of the Harrismith logistics hub has already been completed and an amount of R800 000 has already been committed for the initiation of phase two of the project. A project manager will be appointed in April 2007.

Allow me to briefly explain what this project will entail. Amongst others, it will:

- Incorporate the development of an intermodal rail network;
- Improve information and communication technologies (ICT) capabilities;
- Develop a freight-focused airport;
- Develop cross-dock warehouse operations and truck support facilities;
- Develop an industrial development zone;
- Provide additional residential and urban areas for our people; and also
- Facilitate the movement of freight from the surrounding areas.

The overall programme value is estimated at R4.6 billion and plans are in an advanced stage to conclude the foreign investment agreement for the rollout of this project.

To address the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has been our mainstay. A total of 177 EPWP projects were implemented resulting in 3 081 job opportunities of which 66% was youth, 70% was women and 0.8% was people with disabilities. A total of 400 learnerships in the social and infrastructure sectors were created. The EPWP model of labour based production will inform all our programmes, especially infrastructure delivery.

In partnership with the Mangaung Local Municipality, the Provincial Government will accelerate the development of infrastructure for 2010. These efforts will focus on expanding the Free State stadium, Bloemfontein airport and the intermodal transport facility. We will also ensure that the 2010 benefits and opportunities are extended to all the people of the Free State. I am pleased to announce that we will host the Africa Cup of Nations qualifying soccer match between Bafana Bafana and Chad next month. Bloemfontein will also host the 2007 South Africa Games.

The National Taxi Recapitalisation Project was officially launched in the Province in October 2006. To date 6 536 out of a total of 9 836 permits were converted. Clearly the successful completion of this Programme will restore dignity to our commuters and the industry itself. Public transport is the lifeline of our economy and will continue to receive full Government support.

The development and expansion of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) constitutes one of the key pillars of the FSGDS. It is for this reason that the Free State Development Corporation (FDC) was repositioned to focus primarily on SMME development. We take this opportunity to thank ABSA for the R50 million it has contributed to the joint fund with the FDC.

Our focus in 2007 and beyond will be on the creation and expansion of markets for our small businesses, particularly to the rest of the continent. At the moment we have already approved three projects. We do this to ensure qualitative growth of SMMEs into big businesses.

In order to further strengthen the role of SMMEs in our economy we decided to implement a much more robust support programme. Henceforth, we would like to move towards ring fencing at least 70% of all government procurement for SMMEs and especially women and youth owned businesses. We will also give attention to the skewed picture of registered contractors in terms of the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) grading.

We are going to fast track the upward movement of emerging contractors through a Contractor Development Programme which will, amongst others, link small contractors with well established

ones for mentoring purposes, as well as an incubation process where Government will consciously identify and empower small contractors who have benefited from this training.

In the past year the Province undertook some international visits aimed at increasing the nett value of foreign direct investment in our Province. Several delegations went to, amongst others, Germany, the United States of America (USA), Belgium, Dubai and China.

Owing to these missions a number of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have been signed, which will ensure:

- Investment in the logistics hub;
- Capacity building programmes of our public administrators;
- Learning opportunities for our youth in the fields of engineering and ICT;
- Investment in art, as well as to encourage cultural exchange and empowerment programmes; and
- SMME support and development.

We have 13 students who were selected to go and represent our Province in Germany on exchange programmes in the House this morning. These children completed their training in engineering and they are going on a yearlong exchange programme. This is made possible by the friendships we have been able to establish with Saxony Province in Germany. [Applause]

The partnership with the Flemish Government has yielded results already. A total investment of R30 million was made available to support the establishment of business support centres in three of our districts. While local support has not been as forthcoming as anticipated, we are happy to indicate that these centres will be fully operational in 2007.

In our efforts to deracialise the economy, especially in certain sectors such as asset and property development, we will finalise and implement a provincial asset disposal strategy for noncore state assets. This strategy will be guided by, amongst others, the Property Charter, as well as black economic empowerment (BEE) compliance principles.

Economic development is also a challenge for the private sector. We created an enabling environment for business activity in the Province. Therefore our expectation is for business to:

- Make the most of the central location of the Province;
- Invest in the major economic opportunities identified in the FSGDS in the areas of large scale mining;
- Invest in the creation of scarce skills like artisans, ICT, town and urban planning, management in health and education, as well as in the overall context of the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa);
- Expand the Free State nett export output; and
- Partner with Government on the identification of foreign direct investment opportunities.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the programmatic support we continue to receive from the financial sector. First National Bank, ABSA and Standard Bank are our partners in skills development, SMME support and social service investments. We also appreciate the contribution of the mining sector, the Business Chambers, South African Breweries and Sasol, to

name but a few. We call on the rest of the business sector who have not yet come forward to bring forth practical proposals regarding job creation, economic development, poverty eradication and skills development.

The establishment of the Free State Investment Promotion Agency will ensure that we coordinate all our trade and investment activities in a manner that reinforces public private partnerships. I also want to welcome the Chairperson of the Board of this Agency – uncle Billy (sic), you are very welcome here. [Applause]

Infrastructural development through Asgisa

Throughout this address I touched on the issue of infrastructure development. We know that any form of infrastructure development, be it roads, water supply systems, waste management systems and all others, are linked to economy, social and human development. It is important to view these aspects of our programme as interlinked and in synergy.

We as Provincial Government are working hard to avoid an approach that is based on silos, because this is not only counterproductive, but also costly. Therefore I want to highlight a few projects that we are undertaking within the Asgisa Programme.

Our implementation of Asgisa is aimed at intensifying our work with state owned enterprises to meet water, electricity and telecommunication needs. We will give attention to our roads and rail infrastructure, as well as our social infrastructure through our Infrastructure Plan.

The upgrading of major roads, including those going through Parys - I hope the hon Member Mr Magashule is listening to this – Memel, Reitz, Petrus Steyn, Trompsburg, Jagersfontein, as well as Welkom and Bloemfontein will all be completed this year. All roads that are linked to our Tourism Promotion Programme will be upgraded by the end of the current medium term expenditure framework (MTEF) period.

The finalisation of the Provincial Tourism Development Strategy places us in a much better position to get the highest benefits of our rich tourism, cultural, sporting and heritage endowment. Macufe (Mangaung Cultural Festival), now hosted in partnership with the Tourism Authority and the Performing Arts Centre of the Free State (Pacofs), will be improved into a true global art and cultural pilgrimage.

We wish to inform this House that we will be scaling up our economic activities to a higher plane in 2007. We will place the need to create jobs through a mass targeted approach and the implementation of a poverty eradication strategy at the centre of such a programme. Our main economic flagship projects which will commence this year are:

- The development of the N8 corridor;
- The rehabilitation and revival of the rail network from Thaba 'Nchu to Bloemfontein;
- The establishment of cement manufacturing plants in Henneman and surrounding areas;
- The construction of an international convention centre which will be linked to other 2010 initiatives like the revamping of the Bloemfontein Airport, Macufe, the intermodal transport facility; and
- Infrastructure delivery emphasising the EPWP production model.

Our provincial economy will further be boosted by the establishment of the De Beers owned Voorspoed Diamond Mine next to Kroonstad, as well as the revival of both the Koffiefontein and Jagersfontein mines. Mining remains one of the key economic drivers of the provincial economy. It is for this reason that we will join heads with all the role-players in April to determine the new mining direction for the Province. These mines will contribute to critical capital for the provincial economy and will ease the burden of unemployment.

Our improved capacity to spend, which now stands at 75%, makes us confident that we will indeed be able to complete all of our identified infrastructure projects, valued at R1.6 billion, in this financial year.

Hon Speaker and hon Members of the House, 2006 has truly been a turning point in the delivery of our mandate. We hosted various activities including the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) visit, the launch of the Progressive Women's Movement and the national launch of the Taxi Recapitalization Programme.

We will work even harder to accelerate our war against poverty and unemployment. Key among our focus will be to:

- Intensify our hand with a five year support programme to municipalities that are aimed at improving service delivery and economic development;
- Sustain and improve the current trend of economic growth and reduction of unemployment until we reach the 6% target growth rate;
- Improve on the provincial coordination of skills development initiatives, especially Jispsa;
- Consolidate our resources for the effective implementation of the Asgisa initiatives;
- Roll out a mass targeted programme through infrastructure delivery and EPWP;
- Finalise and roll out a safety and security plan, an infrastructure plan and a tourism development plan in the context of 2010; and
- Intensify a marketing and investment promotion programme, locally and internationally, emphasising the strategic advantages of the Free State.

Good governance and effective administration

The strengthening of our intergovernmental structures is not only a fulfilment of the legislative imperative, but also a conscious effort to bring about greater coordination, synergy and integration of government programmes. The Premier's Coordinating Forum, as well as its administrative wing, continue to provide overall strategic policy and strategic direction over all matters of Government, including municipalities.

This system of cooperative governance has ensured that we give support to municipalities to discharge their obligations of service delivery. The Premier's Coordinating Forum and the District Coordinating Forum have played a pivotal role in giving hands-on support to municipalities and particularly monitoring the successful implementation of Project Consolidate.

We pursue the implementation of Government's Programme of Action through the cluster systems as a mechanism of enhancing greater coordination and integration of departments,

which pursue the same objectives of the FSGDS. The clusters have proved to be extremely effective and the process of rolling them out to districts has already commenced.

Training has been an important feature of our capacity building programme for public servants. Through the Free State Training and Development Institute various accredited training courses were conducted for government officials at all levels. This year, all Heads of Departments (HODs) and all senior managers will attend an executive management course designed to improve our overall implementation capacity.

The conclusion of the Provincial Human Resource Management and Development Strategy will further add impetus to effective management of our human resources, including the management of talent and knowledge through an effective retention strategy.

The launch of the Free State Society for the Enhancement of Public Administration and Governance (Frespag) presents an important opportunity for all public servants to engage in policy and strategic dialogue which will expose Government to the best of ideas. Opportunities for training and mentorship, as well as international exchange programmes make Frespag an important vehicle at the disposal of all our public servants for self and collective development.

We take this opportunity to pay tribute to our African American associate, Professor Phil Rutledge, who worked tirelessly to facilitate the launch of Frespag and facilitated the relationship we have with the American Society for Public Administration and the National Academy of Public Administration. Sadly, Professor Phil Rutledge passed away on 27 January 2007. May his soul rest in peace.

We acknowledge the significant interventions made by National Government through Project Consolidate. This Project increased the capacity of municipalities to enhance local economic development, improve the provision of basic services to communities and improve financial management significantly. This will ensure that a culture of good governance is entrenched in all municipalities.

In addition, the provincial Steering Committee of Project Consolidate, which was established in partnership with Salga, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, state owned enterprises and institutions of higher learning to monitor progress and identify areas of critical need, ensured that we were able to achieve amongst others:

- A sound foundation for municipal administrative leadership through leadership and management training programmes;
- Accelerated infrastructure service delivery and better management of Treasury's responsibilities through the deployment of technical and financial experts (Siyenzamanje Initiative) and the Provincial Government and National Billing Initiative to 10 municipalities;
- Effective planning for service delivery and exploitation of economic opportunities prevalent in localities through technical support such as developing spatial development frameworks and robust engagements in relation to district economic opportunities.

We still need to do more in forging strategic and programmatic partnerships to grow local economies and to mobilise all social partners to join forces with us as we consolidate on our hands-on support to municipalities.

Community Development Workers (CDWs), our special cadres of service delivery have been effectively integrated into the local government system to add to our capacity of effective delivery and community mobilisation.

A total of 265 CDWs are currently active in various municipalities and have been effective to coordinate important Government programmes, like the African Peer Review Mechanism.

They have also been instrumental in working with ward councillors to establish ward committees. A total of 300 ward committees have been established, trained and are operating in line with the national guidelines that were developed by the Department of Provincial and Local Government. Ward committees propelled communication and public participation to greater and better heights.

Our overall view is that the successful hosting of the third democratic local government election on 1 March 2005 and the seamless transition of a new breed of leadership which took over the reins have consolidated the popular participatory nature of our Government. We are more confident now that our leaders in Local Government make time to listen when our people speak and that there is reason, now more than ever, to build municipalities into real organs of the people's Government.

However, there is still a challenge to ensure that all municipalities budget for and ensure the establishment of multipurpose community centres (MPCCs), formally known as Thusong Service Centres. Our vision is that by 2014, all municipalities must have functional MPCCs to enhance access to information and services.

Linked to this, is the challenge to make full use of the benefits of information technology to improve our service delivery turnaround time in municipalities. Provincial Government, in fact all sectors, must invest in ICT literacy as part of our efforts to bridge the digital divide.

In pursuance of this objective we established a provincial ICT forum to oversee the implementation of a comprehensive ICT strategy for the Province. As part of an intervention plan to deal with the needs of municipalities, a total of 134 NQ4 and 100 NQ5 (National Qualifications Framework) level ICT learnerships were completed. These learners will be deployed across municipalities to gain experiential training while they also render an essential service to these municipalities.

Hon Speaker and hon Members of the House, the institution of traditional leadership continues to strongly represent our traditional values. We relate with the Free State House of Traditional Leaders informed by a deep sense of respect for culture, tradition and the values of *Ubuntu* (humanity to others). It is a great honour to report that this relationship is not only symbolic, but has assumed programmatic proportions whereby the traditional leaders continually play a meaningful role in the day to day functions of governance. Provincial Government was able to attend to the financial and infrastructural challenges of this institution in a mutually beneficial manner.

Our education system is another area where much focus and investment has been made. The transformation process of our school system is well underway, although there are many challenges. The relationship between school management systems, governance, community participation, provision of resources and qualitative improvement is a clear indication of the great deal of work being done in the education field. We were able to stabilise our Grade 12 results and we are the first to acknowledge that there is ample room for improvement.

Since 2004 to date we have invested an excess of R160 million in the awarding of bursaries to deserving learners. We are also thankful of the role played by some businesses in awarding bursaries. We call on the rest of the business fraternity to do more and to particularly prioritise the financing of critical skills.

Through our Further Education and Training (FET) programmes we will contribute towards the production of critical skills, particularly artisans and engineers. We will also facilitate exit opportunities which will ensure that once our learners graduate from these centres they are assisted to buy necessary equipment which enhances their smooth transition to the economic world.

In the same breath we need to acknowledge the R96 million investment in skills development in the Province by the Department of Labour. In terms of this initiative a total of 1 865 learners will be trained in tourism, EPWP, construction, manufacturing and ICT. We call on our institutions for higher education to respond to the Province's specific needs that are identified through Jipsa.

Prerequisites of social and human development

Our Government has a responsibility to use the fiscal redistributive mechanism at our disposal to provide a safety net for the poor.

Therefore a comprehensive social security system is a natural ingredient of our social and human development policy. Accordingly, we have a responsibility to provide essential interventions such as social grants, free basic services, free and compulsory education for school going children, free health care, basic accommodation and subsidised public transport.

It is the commitment of our Government to ensure that our people are given a gateway out of poverty through the social security system. As such, social security cannot be an end in itself; we need to do more to ensure that our people are not trapped in poverty for the rest of their lives.

To this end some countries of the south like Brazil and Tunisia amongst others, provide useful reference points to ensure that we look at development and social security models of middle income countries like ours. While many countries, including northern countries may offer useful examples, it is those countries that face similar challenges, both in terms of the scale of poverty, size of the economy, cultural diversity and other social indicators that may prove to be more relevant for us to follow.

Provincial Government will look closely at these comparative models and see which may best assist us in addressing our challenges. In the end, we may have to fashion our own system, but we aim to do so with the benefit of all information that is available to us.

As we undertake this mission we remain guided by the Millennium Development Goals and our 2014 vision, which prioritise the eradication of poverty and unemployment. As we improve the safety net of our impoverished communities, we have prioritised the plight of the most vulnerable in society, especially our children. It is for this reason that in this financial year, which is approaching its end, we have:

- Provided R72 million for the Hot Meal Programme that benefited a total of 413 000 learners; the majority of them are in farm schools;
- Provided 36 978 children with foster care grants;
- Reached a 90% to 95% immunisation coverage for children under the age of one year;
- Trained 981 early childhood development practitioners at NQ level 1 to 4;
- Ensured that 9 804 learners benefited from the Learners Transport Programme;
- Ensured that a total of 1 423 learners benefited from our hostel project; and
- In partnership with the private sector, provided free school uniforms to orphans and vulnerable children.

We also call on our communities and the private sector to continue supporting these government initiatives.

This year, the Provincial Government will adopt a comprehensive Poverty Eradication Strategy that will ensure a targeted approach to families and communities living in poverty.

In the area of health care, Government has pursued a comprehensive health care strategy aimed at undermining the spread of communicable diseases, especially HIV/aids and tuberculosis. A conditional grant of R142 million was allocated to the comprehensive plan on care, management and treatment of HIV/aids. Of this amount, R85 million was allocated to the rollout of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs). The number of patients that currently receive ARVs is 7 553 (814 children and 6 739 adults).

Home based care services are available throughout the Province. The National Youth Service Programme on community home based care that will be rolled out in 20 Free State towns will ensure that more people benefit from this service. This is also part of our National Youth Programme for unemployed graduates in the Province.

This comprehensive health and social development strategy is supported by the provision of healthcare infrastructure like clinics, hospitals and equipment.

We take this opportunity to congratulate and appreciate the voluntary services rendered by many of our volunteers in the health sector. We wish to say that you must keep up the good work. Your selflessness makes our country a very unique place embedded with a rich culture of volunteerism. Keep up the good work! We reiterate our call that healthcare is a joint responsibility between Government and the people.

In meeting the increased challenge of housing and human settlements, we prioritised the rectification of defect housing which has been already allocated to owners. Through this project 143 houses in Xhariep and 345 in Lejweleputswa were completed. The project will be rolled out

to the remaining three districts that were not as badly affected as the two that I have just mentioned.

A number of 9 500 housing subsidies were allocated to all five districts and a great deal of attention has been given to quality assurance and the eradication of buffer zones. As a tribute to the youth and women on National Youth and Women Days respectively, Government approved an allocation of 1 500 houses for youth owned companies and an additional 1 500 houses for women owned companies over a three-year period. Embedded within this project is a strong emphasis on training and skills transfer.

We are proud to announce before this esteemed House, that as we speak today, every household in this Province receives 50kWh (kilowatt-hour) of free basic electricity in all municipalities. All municipalities provide free water to all formal households and registered indigents within their jurisdiction.

The Free State, hon Members, carries the heaviest burden of the bucket system in the whole country and it is no secret. We have however been able to reduce the buckets from 166 000 in 2004 to 99 401 in 2006. We as Province are confident that, together with the municipalities, we will remove the last bucket in this Free State by the end of 2007. [Applause]

Phumelela Municipality stands out as a true indicator of our resolve to rid our people of these dehumanising squalid conditions. Not only have we stabilised the governance of this Municipality, but we are on course to ensure that we eliminate the last bucket in this area. I am sure that we will reach the target by the end of the financial year.

In our address to this hon House during its official opening last year, we pledged to give attention to social infrastructure backlogs. As a result a total of R174 million was spent on education infrastructure projects. Clinics which were lagging behind their completion schedule will now be completed in this financial year. Five new revitalisation projects, which include the National Hospital and the Psychiatric Complex, will commence during the 2008/2009 financial year. An amount of R615 million has been set aside for this project.

More people have access to services now. That translates into an overall improvement in the quality of life of the people of the Free State. We will do all these things and many others, because we are informed by the values of a caring society. Through our words and deeds we must infuse a sense of *Ubuntu* and compassion among our people. We need to emphasise at all times that society, community and family are critical elements of personal development, security and fulfilment. Therefore our individual fortunes are intimately connected to the fortunes of everyone.

In our quest to build a society based on a value system of human solidarity and social activism, we seek to dissuade against corruption and immoral behaviour. It is for this reason that we always call on our social partners to join hands with us as we undertake a moral regeneration campaign in this Province.

We use the occasion of the official opening of this distinguished House to call on parents, teachers, community, church leaders and all organised formations of the Free State to support our initiatives to inculcate a sense of pride, patriotism and respect for self and others. Sport, recreation, reading and social activism will define the key features of our campaign this year.

Our success as Government depends on our ability to encourage, harness and incorporate the energy of the youth into our endeavours to create an environment where their true potential and talents will flourish.

Our focus regarding youth development in 2007 is going to be on the rollout of the National Youth Service. We envisage enrolling a total of 5 000 young people in programmes and projects based on the National Youth Service.

These young people will render essential services like:

- Government building renovations;
- Housing and road construction;
- Road maintenance; and
- Community home based care on a voluntary basis.

At the same time they gain valuable experience and a sense of volunteerism and national pride will be inculcated in them. We will also use the young people to do community based research on social conditions within our Province. This will help us to plan even more effectively for the future.

The Departments of Agriculture, Public Works, Roads and Transport and Social Development have already finalised business plans on the National Youth Service Programme. The National Youth Service Unit, which will be operational this year, will further coordinate the enrolment of the rest of the departments and municipalities.

The Free State Youth Commission continues to operate in an environment conducive to the execution of its lobby and advocacy mandate. Following the provincial conference on youth development held late last year, all government departments and municipalities are in the process of implementing recommendations which address the institutional capacity of youth development machinery in government, as well as the integrated youth development strategy for this Province.

The Youth Commission will convene a private sector conference on youth development later in April. I urge all business organisations of the Free State to support this initiative which will align and coordinate private sector investment in youth development. We further call on all institutions of the state, the private sector and parastatals to support the unemployed graduate database, which can be visited for skills development and job opportunities for our young people.

Hon Speaker, when this Government came into power in 1994, it committed itself to ensure that gender equality and women's emancipation are not only stated principles, but that it actually guides all our operations and are fully implemented in a meaningful manner. In our view, we have to go beyond women's empowerment gauged on the basis of numbers only. The time has come to measure the extent to which participation and empowerment have been given real life in our corridors of power as Government in the projects we implant and the policies we develop.

The greatest achievement was the attainment of 50% representation of women as councillors. We would like to see that such participation leads to effective change in the lives of men and

women. Most importantly, we continue to ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to create an effective and enabling environment for women's growth and leadership to be recognised.

The private sector, once again despite many strides, has taken in the arena of effective gender equality, but women's participation still lags behind. We continue to work hard to ensure that such successes are also expressed at all positions of leadership and responsibility in the public and private sector.

We want to believe that the launch of the Progressive Women's Movement, which took place in our Province last August, creates the necessary organisational capacity to sustain a programme for the emancipation of women. We will work with national and provincial structures of the Progressive Women's Movement to roll out education and empowerment programmes, especially for women in rural areas. We will improve the programmes that profile the achievement of women, like the Free State Female Farmer of the Year, Women in Business, Women in Mining, and all other initiatives that benefit women.

Looking back from 2004 we are justifiably proud of our work to make the Free State a great place of choice to work and live in. We made significant progress to mobilise our communities to take full control of their own development. We narrowed the communication gap between Government, particularly Local Government and the people. We improved public participation and social activism and we can confidently declare that the sense of social cohesion and solidarity, optimism about the future and confidence in the ability of Government to deliver, has been sustained among the people of our Province.

They know that their Government is always willing to listen and ready to admit its own weaknesses in order to improve. They are witnesses of the material changes in their lives through increased access to water, electricity, shelter, basic health care, education and other amenities which makes the promise of a better life for all real. We have been given a vote of confidence in more ways than one as we travelled the length and breadth of our Province through our outreach programmes like the Exco (Executive Council) Meets the People campaign, as well as our provincial and national *Izimbizos* (meetings).

A safe and secure environment is a fundamental right

Building a South Africa that is a safe and secure home for all its people remains a key challenge of our times. We take this opportunity to acknowledge openly that crime is one of our greatest concerns. We know that change will not automatically follow from such an acknowledgement.

To deal with this endemic problem we need a sober, rational, passionate, honest and humane approach that will help us to understand the causes and manifestation of crime in our society.

There is no denying that our society continues to use violence as a means of control and coercion. The statistics of contact crime in intimate spaces like home, as well as the victimisation of vulnerable groups like children and the elderly confirm this fact. Where does this culture of violence come from? It comes from denial – all forms of denial, including denying the impact of the past on the present, the wide social inequality and the sophisticated levels of organised crime in our society.

Based on a systematic analysis of the different forms of crime, we recognised that only a holistic and comprehensive approach can help us stem the tide of violence. It has to begin with a spirit of common humanity which must be instilled in all our people. Obviously we have to recognise that there must be short-, medium- and long-term programmes so that we can have quick wins and long-term results. This systematic approach will prove to be productive in the long run. To this effect we have begun to address crime by involving all stakeholders.

Last year Government embarked on an aggressive community mobilisation programme in order to give effect to the partnership against crime. Among other things we:

- Convened a consultative conference on community policing forums (CPFs) to build our capacity, profile the work of CPFs in the Province and to improve networking among CPFs, municipalities and the South African Police Service (SAPS);
- Held a rural safety conference to develop programmes to improve the safety of our rural communities, develop partnership between organised agriculture communities, the SAPS, as well as municipalities and to strengthen the provincial rural safety committee;
- Finalised and implemented a provincial tourism safety campaign; and
- Focused on priority crimes like rape, assault, and robbery.

We are happy to report that our Integrated Crime Prevention Strategy has yielded positive results. Over the last year we witnessed a significant decrease of about 8% in all incidents of contact crime which includes murder, rape, assault, and common robbery.

This was made possible by the commitment of our women and men in blue uniform, the participation of our communities in CPFs and an increase in the number of police reservists. We take this opportunity to particularly commend the SAPS on behalf of the people of the Free State. Their commitment is inspirational. Slowly but surely the space for criminals is getting narrower and narrower by the day. We want to urge you - keep up the good work! [Applause]

In our recent meeting with the Free State Agricultural Union, we discussed ways to implement the resolutions of the Provincial Rural Safety Summit with speed. We agreed to establish a task team comprising of Agri-Free State, the National African Farmers Union (NAFU), the SAPS, as well as representatives of the communities amongst other things. They are to:

- Compile a data base of all farmsteads and link them to the nearest police station;
- Intensify communication between Government and organised agriculture; and
- Effectively integrate farm workers into rural safety campaigns.

Our relationship with organised agriculture has improved significantly over the last two and a half years. We value their input on not only to matters affecting them, but on all programmes pursued to develop our Province and her people.

When we speak about the situation of farmers, we often neglect to speak about the plight of farm workers. During the course of this year, we are going to intensify dialogue on this matter and unite the whole of society behind a comprehensive understanding of agriculture in the Free State.

Our challenge moving forward is to build a broad front for the creation of safe and secure communities. This programme will need the support of everybody, both in terms of advocacy and

partnerships. The recent launch of Business against Crime further strengthens the partnership required to undermine all forms of crime, including white-collar crime.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all hon Members of the Executive Council, the Premier's Economic Advisory Council and to all our social partners for the role that you have played to ensure that we create sustainable development in our Province. As we move towards 2009 and beyond, we will strengthen our mobilisation work to impress upon all structures of civil society, private sector and religious formations to work with us as we consolidate a broad front to eradicate poverty.

Hon Speaker, distinguished guests and hon Members of this House, surely even those who make a profession out of criticising us will finally agree that a lot has been accomplished to create a better life for all.

As Nelson Mandela said:

To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that enhances the freedom of others.

I am sure that as we move forward in this Province, we will take queue from what he has said and ensure that as we remove our chains, we also remove the shackles that are still within some of us, create a better Province, create a better understanding of who we are and jointly work to ensure that our Province will achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves.

Hon Speaker, when we addressed this House in 2004, 2005, and 2006, I had the pleasure of having my mother in the audience to listen to the State of the Province Address. Last year, hon Speaker, you also honoured her by giving her a bouquet of flowers and a lovely gift. That was the last gift she received from anyone.

I want to take this opportunity to honour the memory of my mother. She is not with us today and she will never be with us in real life. However, I think that her spirit is sitting amongst us this morning and she can also say that the Province has indeed come a long way. I am sure that she will sit on each and everyone's shoulder just to say: "Soldier on to what is best for the Province".
