



the premier

Department of
the Premier
FREE STATE PROVINCE

2008 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER F.B. MARSHOFF

15 February 2008

Hon Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Free State Legislature, hon Members of the Legislature, Leaders of Political Parties represented in this House, the leadership of SALGA, Executive Mayors and Mayors, distinguished representatives of our House of Traditional Leaders, representatives of the private sector, our social partners, distinguished guests, comrades and friends, the people of the Free State.

We stand before this hon House and in front of the people of the Free State to give an account of the work we have done in pursuit of the ideals of a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society.

Even as we do so, we understand that our own humble contribution builds on the legacy of those who came before us and left indelible footprints in the history of our Province.

In this regard we take this opportunity of this august gathering, to pay tribute to leaders of this democratic Government, who had a very difficult responsibility of translating the ideals and aspirations of our people into concrete Government programmes.

We note that these leaders had no reference point, as our own democratic Government had to deal with the accumulated deficit of Apartheid colonialism with the greatest urgency.

We want to say today that the past Premiers, who themselves were part of dedicated and competent teams of loyal servants of the Free State, disposed very well of themselves.

Hon Speaker, allow us on behalf of the people of the Free State to express our appreciation to the leadership provided by these former Premiers, Mosioua Lekota, Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi and Isabella Winkie Direko.

We are extremely proud that we were given an opportunity to continue with their assignment of leading the people of the Free State to a prosperous destiny.

We are also proud to share this important occasion of the Official Opening of the Democratic Law Making House of our Province, with our friends and compatriots from Cuba. The presence of these comrades here today, is a confirmation that the bonds of struggle will keep our people together in our quest for the creation of a better world order. Indeed, our liberation was inspired by the selflessness of the Cuban people who in the words of Che Guevara when explaining their spirit, said:

That let me at the expense of sounding ridiculous, state that a true revolutionary is guided by

great feelings of love.

They are here today to see to it that our task of reconstructing our country, post Apartheid, is made easier.

We welcome:

- Ms Delia Maria Rodriguez Santos - an electrical engineer,
- Mr Danis Lima Quesdas - a mechanical engineer; and
- Ms Elaine Claridad Verdecia Lopez - a civil engineer.

They are joining our Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport for a three-year period, to contribute in addressing our scarce-skills shortage, since among other responsibilities they have, will be to mentor and train up-and-coming engineers.

Hon Deputy Speaker, when we assumed office in 2004, our country had just concluded a decade of freedom. It was a decade dedicated completely to the creation of democratic governance and the mobilization of our people to support and defend their Government in its quest to create a better life for all!

We too, like our predecessors are inspired by the words drawn from the song: The Call of South Africa where it says:

Ringin' out from our blue heavens, from our deep seas breaking round;
Over everlasting mountains where the echoing crags resound;
From our plains where cracking wagons cut their trails into the earth
Calls the spirit of our country, of the country that gave birth to us.

At thy call we shall not falter, firm and steadfast we shall stand,

At thy will to live or perish South Africa dear land

In our body and our spirits, in our inmost hearts held fast;

In the promise of our future and the glory of our past;

In our will, our work, our striving, from the cradle to the grave -

There is no land that shares our loving and no bond that can enslave.

Hon Deputy Speaker, the overwhelming majority, who renewed the democratic mandate of our Government, made it clear that we need to do all in our power, within the next five years of our term of office, to strive towards:

- Economic growth and inclusion;
- Comprehensive social security;
- Fighting crime and corruption;
- Ensuring constitutional rights and governance; and
- Building a better Africa and world.

This mandate is a consolidation of the collective aspiration of more than two-thirds of the Free State voters who are very confident of our ability and determination to fulfil their aspirations, working together with them.

We are proud to affirm that the people of this Province are satisfied with our work.

According to the community survey conducted by Stats SA in February 2007, focusing on meeting basic needs, developing our human resources and building the economy, it shows that the people of the Free State have confidence in the future.

They say that 2007 was better than 2001 and that 2001 was indeed better than 1996. They confirm that today is definitely better than yesterday and that the future will indeed be better.

Our people therefore, have every reason to be optimistic about the future, for their Government has demonstrated unwavering commitment towards improving their lives.

They have not been mere recipients of goods and services, but have been active participants in the architecture of their own destiny. They have partnered Government in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, which prioritize the halving of poverty and unemployment by 2014.

We know already that the Household Survey, which will be released by Stats SA (sic) in March this year, will again re- confirm that we are on the right track and that our star will continue to shine even brighter.

Buoyed by this confluence of positives and a reaffirmation of a brighter future, yesterday we launched the new corporate identity for the Free State Provincial Government. The launch of the corporate identity comes at the time when the whole of Government has assessed its capacity in relation to priorities towards 2009.

This corporate identity is a symbol of this energy and strong partnerships to deliver on our mandate. It is part of our collective effort to reposition Government to be at the centre of service delivery. It symbolizes the new beginning, which will inspire excellence in service delivery.

Hon Deputy Speaker, we pursue the programme of Government in line with our Free State Growth and Development Strategy. The strategy remains the overarching policy framework, which spells out our developmental path and a roadmap towards the attainment of our 2014 vision.

Allow us to share with this hon House and the people of the Free State our Economic Growth and Development Perspective over the last year.

The people shall share in the country's wealth!

We are proud to report that as a result of our relentless pursuit of our Free State Growth and Development Strategy, particularly the pursuit of economic growth and development objective; we witnessed an upward growth trajectory of our economy, which grew to an impressive 4.2% leading to a welcome decline of unemployment to only 26.5% from the original 30.8%.

Hon Deputy Speaker and Members of the House, the Free State Growth and Development Strategy goes beyond mapping the provincial development perspective. It infuses an approach to shape integrated governance. This includes creating institutional mechanisms crucial for shared growth and development.

Our economic growth and development objectives have been largely defined by our need to:

- Attain economic growth rate of 6-7% annually;
- Reduce unemployment to 15% by 2014;
- Reduce number of Households living in poverty by 5% per annum; and
- Provide infrastructure for economic growth and development.

A number of these objectives are already yielding laudable results as indicated earlier especially in the areas of economic growth and unemployment reduction. Our Province is the third Province after the Western Cape and Gauteng with the lowest unemployment rate.

We have a responsibility to strengthen and consolidate the main driving economic sectors, namely finance, real estate and business service. As we do that we have to ensure the application of the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Policy.

The investment in our road infrastructure will continue to gain prominence in our Province in our endeavour to eradicate structural and social imbalances and our determination to grow the economy by capitalizing on our central and strategic location in the country.

We have in the past year, invested more than R723 million in line with our road infrastructure investment. We will provide a further R1 billion to stimulate rural mobility, integration of spatial planning and transportation, freight transport and transport network in support of economic development.

We have also pursued the construction of access roads through the EPWP model (Expanded Public Works Programme) model and empowered our people to obtain active participation in the local economy. These include the Thaba Phatswa, Monontsha access road and Route 4 in Qwaqwa, all to the value of R206 million.

As we mentioned this time last year, we are well on course regarding the taxi recapitalization programme. The taxi industry plays an important role in the public transport arena catering for more than 64% of the public transport commuters on a daily basis. The recapitalisation programme is important in the context of providing safe, reliable and affordable transportation, because in our view, public transport constitutes the backbone of our economy.

To date, we have paid out R76 million to various taxi operators and a total of 1520 unroadworthy taxis have been removed from our roads. A further 2130 vehicles have been registered for scrapping.

Furthermore, the resounding success achieved in the completion of the Free State freight databank has placed us in a better position to finalize the provincial freight transport framework and strategy.

In addition, we are satisfied with progress registered at the level of the 2010 preparations. The

Local Organizing Committee is hands on and has demonstrated sufficient levels of commitment and confidence to prepare our city and Province for this great occasion. All the major master plans regarding transport, ICT, and safety and security, have been finalized.

The cooperation with our neighbouring country of the Kingdom of Lesotho and the Northern Cape Province will extend the economic benefits far beyond the borders of the Free State.

Progress is evident regarding the stadium upgrade, transport related projects, which includes the Mangaung Activity Corridor and the establishment of the intermodal facility. Business plans and funding for major capital projects have been finalized and these include among others:

- access roads from N8 to Bloemfontein Airport;
- revamping of resorts;
- water distribution and purification works;
- ICT development and upgrade;
- establishment of a sports museum; and
- installation of CCTV cameras in Mangaung.

Hon Speaker, we will show the world, like our compatriots shown in Ghana during the African Cup of Nations, that the exuberance of the African Spirit and our great love for life and humanity will ensure that the whole of our country and our Province will present the best world cup ever. [Applause]

Our economic interventions will continue to stimulate shared economic growth and create employment. We will continue to engage all our social partners to ingrain the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and provide more support for these initiatives. Through these initiatives, we hope to create more jobs, as job creation remains one of our apex priorities in this Province.

Among some of our noticeable achievements on our economic growth and development perspective include:

- Developing an improved funding model for SMME's;

And this is very evident in our Province, hon Members.

- The finalization of the property management as well as our tourism development strategies;
- The finalization of the Supply Chain Management policy;
- The establishment of a central supplier database to ensure equity and transparency;
- Approval of alternative funding model for school building programme for completion in a single financial year.

Moving forward, this year, we will strengthen the Free State Investment Promotion Agency to pursue vigorous investment initiatives in line with our programme of marketing the Free State and economic diplomacy guidelines.

Existing relations with foreign countries and agencies will be consolidated to ensure that the

benefits we already enjoy in the fields of human capital development, exchange programmes and possible investment in the provincial economy are strengthened and improved.

Our economic diplomacy and international relations programme spearheaded by the Department of Foreign Affairs will be pursued to:

- Strengthen our engagements with the traditional markets such as the European Union and the US, both of which are important players in the WTO;
- Strengthening engagements with emerging markets of the BRIC countries, namely Brazil, India, Russia and China;
- Pursue economic diplomacy with the rest of Africa through initiatives such as NEPAD and the recently launched Pan African Infrastructural Development Fund;
- Strengthening engagement with regional blocs and strengthening relations with multilateral bodies.

We had the privilege of being hosted by the state of California, where we studied the possibility of developing the film industry in the Province. We are happy to report that the Executive Council has approved the establishment of the Free State Films Commission, which will be fully operational this year.

This is a plea to all our young and aspiring film makers to really come out and support us in this endeavour, because we are really doing it for you, the young people of the Free State.

In this financial year, we also visited India and Germany, where existing agreements regarding the training and development of our students, especially in the fields of science, information technology and engineering, were further strengthened. Last year at the Opening of this august House we hosted a few of our students who were on their way to Germany. And I can report back to this House that they are very well settled and they are enjoying their time in Germany. [Applause]

Hon Deputy Speaker, we were also invited to participate in the Accenta Trade Fair in Belgium, where we were guests of honour of the Belgium people. This meant that we were able to showcase the best of our exports, arts and culture as well as tourism opportunities to more than 100 000 people who came to visit our stand.

I wish I had the opportunity to just showcase and allow some of the people who participated in that trade fair, to indicate to this House the successes and connections they have made and to what extent they have been able to build trade relations with the Flemish people.

We have also improved a great deal regarding the coordination of our international work and some of our efforts are yielding positive results in pursuit of our economic development and inclusion imperatives. The meeting facilitated by the Department of Foreign Affairs later this month where necessary coordination and synergies of programmes will be consolidated will further strengthen this work that we agree on.

Notwithstanding this impressive performance, we always have to ensure that the benefits of our economic growth are widely shared. As part of this endeavour, ASGISA was initiated as a framework to raise the range of growth through particular interventions.

Inherent in this conception was the mutual reinforcing nature of the first and second economies. Subsequently, the Office of the Premier was then able to build the necessary capacity to pursue our ASGISA programmes as well as the JIPSA initiative to respond to human capital constraints as part of programmes to set the country on a daring shared growth and integrated development trajectory.

We have completed the first phase of the Harrismith Logistical Hub, which when completed will become our multi modal freight logistical base in the Free State. The second phase of the project will commence in the new financial year and will entail amongst others, the mobilization of stakeholders and participants such as freight companies. We have set aside R2 million for the initial stages of the second phase.

Regarding our Bio-fuel initiative, initial indicators were that the private sector – and note: the private sector (not Government) would commit R640 million for the establishment of a plant in Bothaville and that the Free State Provincial Government would play a facilitating and supporting role.

We have subsequently had to reconsider our options regarding this project. The recent Cabinet decision to exclude the usage of maize for this initiative means that we have to go back to the drawing board to consider other options and explore alternative crops including secondary generation products.

However, I also have to indicate to this House that we have not completely given up on the maize project.

There are further engagements regarding this matter, which builds on the recommendations of our Bio-fuel seminar held last year in October, and we will be in a position to make an announcement soon.

Alongside these ASGISA initiatives, the Province had other flagship projects that were identified in response to the President's call for high impact projects. These included:

- The Thaba 'Nchu-Bloemfontein rail network for which we have secured the commitment from the South African Rail Commuters Commission. A tender has been issued to invite contractors to deal with the project design following a very positive feasibility study;
- The N8 Development Corridor, which we pursue as part of our legacy projects which was highlighted earlier;
- The establishment of the cement mine in Hennenman, for which we have already received a Min-Tek report, which we are currently studying with a view towards small-scale mining targeting women in mining.
- The construction of the International Convention Centre whose processes await the finalization of land expropriation at the identified area.

And I can confirm that the water is safe – it is tap water.

These high impact projects are part of the ASGISA initiatives and they are currently underway.

Hon Speaker, we continue to turn the tide on the development of agriculture as a sustainable economic contributor, especially regarding emerging and small farmers.

During the current financial year, we invested R14.5 million for installation and development of pivots and R2 million for additional inputs and mechanization for the Oppermansdorp project. The support of this project has enabled 42 households registered as beneficiaries to enter into a commercial enterprise through a partnership with a local farmer. The project has a turnover of R12 million per annum.

I want to take this opportunity to say, thank you to Oom Etienne van der Walt, for the help and mentoring that he is giving to those people at Oppermansgronde.

I invite all of you to visit this project, which is among those that stand out as an example of partnership between emerging and established farmers.

Furthermore, responsible usage of land prompted us to initiate programmes and campaigns to promote land care. The emphasis was on educating the youth and during this financial year, more than 1000 learners from different schools participated in the land care programme focusing on the promotion of natural resource management.

We are pleased to announce that during the recent visit of a delegation from the People's Republic of China, an agreement to finance an aqua-culture training centre in the Xhariep District to the value of R29 million, was concluded.

This project will be implemented during the 2008/2009 financial year and will benefit not only the people of the Free State and especially Xhariep, but the rest of the country and countries falling within the SADC region.

We will continue giving attention to the distribution of land as an important programme of our social transformation. We will intensify our efforts in collaboration with the Department of Land Affairs and in this regard ensure that the process is expedited.

During the current financial year, we have developed a Provincial Commonage Policy in consultation with all role players and farmers unions. The adoption of this commonage policy will ensure that Municipalities are able to factor agricultural development into their IDPs and local economic development strategies.

Hon Speaker, we indicated during the Official Opening of this House last year that our economic rejuvenation programme will depend on the extent to which we invest in infrastructure development.

Our overall infrastructure development programmes have demonstrated this sense of urgency on our part and it is therefore very pleasing to indicate that of the R 1,6 billion budget for infrastructure, we have to date spent R1.2 billion which is 75% of the total budget.

This approach has energized our economic activism, which included job creation and poverty alleviation. We hope to continue with the same energy and speed in the new financial year as part and parcel of our commitment to “Business unusual”!

The people shall govern!!

Hon Deputy Speaker, the founding provisions of our 1996 democratic Constitution, provides that South Africa is a democratic state. Undoubtedly one of the cornerstones of this Government is the participation of the public in decision-making processes.

During her visit to the Province in November 2007, the Deputy President expressed satisfaction with the Provincial Government's ways of working, particularly, the coherence of our cluster system, and the overall effectiveness of our institutional arrangements in accordance with our priorities.

Allow us, hon Deputy Speaker, to share our Provincial Governance and Administration perspective.

The main areas of governance and administration are on the Five-Year Local Government Strategic Agenda as well as institutional capacity.

Our emphasis on Local Government is informed by our acknowledgement that this sphere is the epicentre of service delivery. It is a conduit between Government and citizens in the service delivery chain.

Our overall mid-term assessment, done in July last year, places our Province as a leader in quality service provision and overall satisfaction by our communities.

Notwithstanding other important achievements in this area, perhaps our most significant success is the extent to which we have been able to close down the communication gap between Government and the people and to deal with the persistent perception of corruption and poor service delivery.

Today, as we speak, levels of public participation in all Government programmes and the feedback we receive on our performance indicates that our efforts of renewing our partnership for growth and development has found meaningful expression and further demonstrates unity in action.

Our key performance areas on the strengthening of local Government include:

- Municipal transformation and organizational development;
- Basic service delivery;
- Local economic development;
- Municipal financial viability; and
- Good governance and public participation.

We are satisfied with overall progress regarding these performance indicators and we are the first to acknowledge that there is more room for improvement, especially in the areas of local economic development and Municipal financial viability.

It is also particularly pleasing to report that all District Municipalities have aligned their spatial development frameworks with the Free State Growth and Development Strategy and have all convened District Growth and Development Summits to align their prioritization processes with

the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy. To further illustrate the levels of improvement at local Government level it is worth noting that by the end of June last year, all Municipalities in the Province had adopted their IDPs, which are aligned to the FSGDS.

The financial management position of Municipalities reveals a great measure of improvement. By the end of the financial year 2006/2007, 89% of the total budget for the Municipal Infrastructure Grant had been spent.

More and more Municipalities are establishing audit committees, which greatly assist towards adherence to the Municipal Finance Management Act (56/2003). A total of 21 out of 25 Municipalities have established supply chain committees and all section 57 managers have been trained on the Supply Chain Management Policy.

The Province, through the Provincial Treasury, supports, monitors and reports on Municipal financial performance and provides early warning information and interventions to Municipalities.

The enthusiastic participation of all Municipalities in the structural arrangements of our intergovernmental relations is something worth noting. The Premier's Coordinating Forum, comprising of the Executive Mayors as well as Mayors, Members of the Executive Council, SALGA, Traditional Leaders, the Youth Commission and the NCOP representative, is now operating at full capacity.

This forum meets on a quarterly basis and has been instrumental in providing strategic leadership and direction on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Free State Growth and Development Strategy as well as the Five-Year Local Government Strategic Agenda.

Participatory governance is another enduring trait of local Government. The establishment of structures for popular democratic participation is always important. To this end, we have established a total of 296 functional ward committees and appointed a further 284 community development workers. This extra capacity has made it possible that we respond much quicker to the views and recommendations of our communities and that we remain accountable.

In addition to the Presidential *Izimbizo* and the *Imbizo* focus week, we have also intensified our EXCO-Meets-the-People campaign as our developmental communication strategy to encourage public participation, accountability and ownership.

These outreach programmes are not mere symbolic public relation exercises but have proven to be effective platforms of consolidating service delivery and of ensuring that at all times, Government at all levels speaks in the same voice and acts to fulfil the real aspirations of our people.

Hon Deputy Speaker, as stated earlier, investment in human capital and organizational development is high on our agenda. The Free State Provincial Government has developed and adopted a Human Resource and Development Strategy, to help us orientate, train and retain the best cadres of the Public Service who understand that their individual and collective actions determine the pace at which their Government will succeed or fail.

Beyond infusing an ethos of service excellence and continuous learning, the strategy is at the same time about creating a compassionate Public Service where the needs of the community are

treated with the necessary urgency and discipline.

Our immediate priority regarding the development of our human capital is the matter of gender mainstreaming and appropriate skills acquisition and retention. Women constitute 20% of our Heads of Provincial Departments, 20% of the 25 Municipal Managers and 23.7% of the FSPG Senior Managers. Whilst at the political front, gender representation is much more pronounced, it is at an administrative sphere where we still have challenges.

Although our current figures of 1.1% regarding employment of people living with disabilities are higher than the national average, we will work very hard to reach the 2% national target.

It is for this reason that we are implementing an employment equity plan, which emphasizes the recruitment of women and people with disabilities.

There shall be houses, security and comfort for all!

Hon Deputy Speaker, true freedom can only be measured by the extent to which people have been freed from the bondages of poverty, underdevelopment and ignorance. We pursue our social and human development objectives informed by our developmental mandate, which requires that at all times, whilst we demonstrate the attributes of a caring Government, we mitigate against a tendency of reliance and dependency by our people.

Our understanding is that Government expenditure on social security must stimulate and generate economic activism and must empower the people to take part in the economic life of our Province.

Our efforts to improve access to water have produced more than gratifying results. The Province has surpassed the 372 077-baseline provision of water provision to indigent households by 12%.

Of all our registered indigents, this Government has been able to provide free basic water to 90% and a further 91% have access to free basic electricity. The overall percentage of people who have access to electricity for lighting is 87%. These indicators, when viewed in relation to our electoral mandate, confirm that there has always been congruence between Government priorities and the most basic needs of our people.

In spite of the largest backlog of buckets in the country, we are happy to announce that the only remaining buckets in the Province have been reduced from 160 000 to a mere 28 000 at the end of January this year. We are confident, hon Deputy Speaker and hon Members of this House, that we will remove the last of these buckets and free our people from this dehumanizing situation.

Consistent with our vision of providing housing and shelter, we have allocated 14 780 subsidies to various programmes which includes the empowerment of women and youth for housing provision.

Access to quality health care services has seen considerable progress. Quality assurance programmes have been implemented at all hospitals.

The implementation of the Strategic Plan for HIV and Aids and the re-establishment of the

Provincial Council on Aids, reflects renewed determination to tackle this and other communicable diseases and lifestyle diseases, in partnership with all our social partners.

Our emphasis has correctly been on drawing as many people as possible in programmes to tackle all forms of diseases and to take a holistic view, that advocacy alone will not resolve our problems, but that socio-economic interventions are also critical in the reduction and elimination of all forms of diseases.

During this 2007/2008 financial year, we have increased the ARV sites by a further two sites in Motheo District and a further six sites in the Fezile Dabi District.

A total of R60.900 000 has been spent on capital projects which include:

- the Dealesville Community Health Centre;
- Thusanong maternity ward in Odendaalsrus;
- the Orthopaedic trauma ward and renal unit and a new pharmacy at Pelonomi;
- the Winburg clinic; and
- the Moroka Multi-Drug Resistance Unit.

The completion of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) control room means that we will be able to shorten our reaction time and provide emergency services in a much more efficient manner.

To further enhance the provision of quality health care, we are going to re-open an EMS college as well as strengthen our aero medical services, which we are implementing jointly with Red Cross to improve responses to emergencies and transport of patients.

Hon Deputy Speaker, in an effort to enhance the overall quality of our education, we have developed the sustainable matric intervention strategy. Other measures include the Dinaledi initiative to improve mathematics, science and technology. Our overall results in all grades, reflect a consistent overall qualitative improvement and we are at a point where we believe that our education is finally ridding itself of Apartheid education and its associate problems such as high drop out rates.

We want to make a bold announcement that we intend, in this new financial year, to abolish all remaining platoon schools with the building of 11 new schools, the construction of additional facilities at 4 new schools as well as the completion of current projects already under construction. People of the Free State, this Government is working for you! [Applause]

The future of our children remains our priority. The Early Childhood Development Programme remains an important intervention, which we are continuously improving. To date more than 100 000 children are registered for this programme.

We are happy to report that our intervention programmes remain on course. The implementation of the no-fee schools has broadened access and quality formal education and today covers 154 951 learners in 198 schools. This policy has opened the doors of learning to many of our deserving children.

The learner transport programme is continuing to benefit an ever-increasing number of learners in tandem with the available budget. I know, hon Members – through you, hon Deputy Speaker –

that we are experiencing problems in this regard, but these are not problems and challenges that we cannot address. The Department has already gone a long way in addressing the hardships experienced by our service providers.

This programme has been expanded from covering 5 132 to 9804. This programme has enhanced focused learning of all learners from a poor socio-economic background.

I am happy to report that the problem regarding payments of our service providers has been resolved and systems have been improved to ensure a professional and mutually beneficial arrangement between Government and service providers. [Applause]

Many learners who would today be affected by the closure of non-viable farm schools are benefiting from our hostel accommodation project. A total of 1 373 learners, benefit from this programme, which is a direct response to a demand for the creation of a conducive learning environment for vulnerable children.

The intervention programme for matriculants who did not make it during the 2007 examinations, will ensure that no learner is disadvantaged from further education opportunities and we want to take this opportunity to appeal to all our learners to take advantage of this opportunity and to make the best of their second chance.

Please enrol at the centres so that you can be able to complete your Grade 12.

Hon Deputy Speaker, we continue to provide bursaries to our deserving learners. To date since the consolidation of the Provincial Government Bursary Scheme, we have allocated bursaries in excess of R200 million. This year, we intend to track all recipients of these bursaries to further assist them with placement and to motivate them to plough back into their communities.

Hon Speaker, the position of young people today is characterized by veritable social, economic and other dynamics. This makes them key players in the shared economic growth and development landscape of our Province. In essence the youth are the core of the Province's human capital.

We have a responsibility therefore to implement programmes aimed at their holistic development. Our priority will be the National Youth Service Programme. A coordinating unit will be established to oversee the rollout and registration of the National Youth Service Programmes in all Municipalities and Departments during the new financial year.

The finalization of an integrated youth development strategy remains one of our main priorities during this year and our efforts will extend even to Municipalities to ensure that matters of youth development are integral to our planning and budgeting processes.

Some of the programmes currently undertaken by the Free State Youth Commission such as the Provincial Youth Fund, the unemployment graduate database, the development of the arts, youth advisory centres, youth and environment and safety and security projects, serve to reinforce our youth development philosophy, that young people can never be recipients of services, but have to be in the forefront of their own development.

Hon Speaker, as we reported in this hon House last year, we are ready with the implementation

of the national skills development programme targeting scarce skills. This programme will benefit a total of 1 865 learners in the learning areas of youth and women in housing construction, extended public works, artisans, tourism as well as bio-fuel learnerships.

The formal launch of this JIPSA initiative will be on Monday the 25th February here in Bloemfontein.

It is important to reflect, hon Speaker, that despite the report of the Public Protector on the appointment of the current serving youth commissioners, not much has happened in the proposed investigations by the Ethics Committee. It remains our view that the appointment has been done in the best interest of the development of young people of the Free State and any further shadow of doubt cast over the legitimacy of the Free State Youth Commission, undermines the inherent potential of their impact on youth development in our Province.

The Provincial Integrated Poverty Alleviation Strategy has been finalized and draws on the various interventions currently underway in the Province. We will launch the strategy in the first quarter of this year.

We remain focused on our programme of addressing the social infrastructure backlog through the Extended Public Works programme. This includes the building of schools, hospital revitalization and construction of new libraries.

The development of sports and culture is equally central to the socio-economic development of these programmes. We have been in a position to tap on the outstanding performance of our sport teams and correctly repositioned our Province as a favourite sporting and cultural destination.

The hosting of the 2007 SA games, the Inaugural Sports Legend Function, the SABC Sports Awards and the Baby Boxing Champs Competition, have firmly entrenched our position as a leading sporting Province and naturally opened up enormous other opportunities.

As we speak, hon Deputy Speaker, tonight and tomorrow we are also hosting the South African Boxing Awards in our Province.

There shall be peace and security!

Hon Speaker, the creation of safe and secure communities constitutes the basic essence of our freedom. True freedom means that our women can walk the streets without fear of being attacked and raped.

It means that our people can go about their daily business without fear of intimidation, robbery and acts that violate their rights. Our focus remains the reduction of all forms of crime and to mobilize community partnership to narrow down the space for criminal activities.

There is a notable decline in incidents of rape, assaults and burglary at residential areas. Generally the rate of contact crime is on a downward spiral and we intend to keep it that way.

The Provincial Government together with the SAPS and other partners are implementing the National Crime Prevention Strategy in line with our own provincial priority crimes. The coordination and facilitation of the integrated social crime prevention programmes in line with the

national strategy has also received our attention. These programmes include:

- the anti-rape strategy;
- the educational programmes on victim empowerment and mobilization; and
- the education of youth on crime awareness.

We have successfully launched the Provincial Security Policy and are already in the implementation stages. In this regard we give adequate attention to matters of cross-border and transnational crimes, like syndicates and illegal immigration. However, stock theft also remains high on the agenda.

Our current emphasis is on the implementation of the Victim Empowerment Programme as one of the National Crime Prevention Strategies aimed at dealing with the needs of crime victims through a multifaceted and inclusive approach.

We will establish VEP centres in the remaining districts. Apart from adequate resourcing through own revenue and partnerships, we will market these centres so that the intended beneficiaries have access to this important service.

We do however, want to make a point, that crime is neither a political nor a race issue. It affects all our people without due regard to race, class, gender or political affiliation. We plead therefore, for strengthening of partnerships and collaboration in building a strong front to fight crime. Politicians must therefore, desist from exploiting the vulnerability of our communities, for narrow political expediency.

We hope to conclude our discussions with organized farmer unions regarding the safety and security challenges confronted by those on the farms. Furthermore, we have developed the Rural Safety Strategy, which is a product of wide consultation and its success will depend on everybody's involvement and commitment.

We all have a responsibility to reclaim our safety and security and narrow down the space for criminals and criminality.

Towards a brighter tomorrow

Hon Speaker, the release in 2006 of the Macro Social Report, A Nation in the Making, has firmly placed the promotion of social cohesion, nation building and national identity on the agenda of Government.

The recent Cabinet Lekgotla approved a framework on vision 2010 and a programme of action on social cohesion. The proposed implementation framework for vision 2010 and a Programme of Action on Social Cohesion, takes into account the dialectical relationship between the improvement of material and social conditions and the strengthening of human solidarity and social cohesion.

The following objectives have been identified as rallying points for the framework of this vision 2010 and social cohesion, and they are to:

- Promote social cohesion, nation building and national identity;
- Eliminate poverty, unemployment and other symptoms of underdevelopment;
- Eliminate racism, xenophobia and intolerance;
- Create a sustainable, socio-economic environment conducive for hosting the 2010 FIFA

- Soccer World Cup;
- Develop and sustain the legacy programme.

In the same breath, we will finalize plans in the context of our Values in Education Programme to support the President's call to strengthen patriotism among our children, learners and youth.

Hon Deputy Speaker, our commitment to the promotion and protection of our vulnerable groups, will continue to receive our undivided attention.

Children, the aged and people living with disabilities will always serve as our barometer of a caring Government. We are confident that we will build on the successes of our community mobilization and participation in programmes aimed at raising awareness. In this regard we want to single out the Million Men's March hosted by our Province to highlight the plight of abused women and children. The attributes of a caring society must inform our future endeavours.

These attributes are best described by our former State President, Mr Nelson Mandela, when receiving the Nobel Peace Prize when he said:

They too must be relieved of the burden of despair, which they carry in their hearts, born of hunger, homelessness and unemployment.

The value of the gift of freedom to all who suffered will and must be measured by the happiness and welfare of all the people of our country, who will have torn down the inhuman walls that divide them.

The value of our shared reward will and must be measured by the joyful peace, which will triumph, because the common humanity that bonds both black and white into one human race, will have said to each one of us that we shall live like the children of paradise.

Thus we shall live, because we will have created a society which recognizes that all people are born equal, with each entitled in equal measures of life, liberty, prosperity, human rights and good governance.

We strive for this society and these values, and it is our firm belief that acting together with our people, this vision shall be a reality.

During the State of the Nation Address by President, Thabo Mbeki, a detailed account of the current problems regarding electricity was given. Such an explanation helps all of us to have a common understanding and approach because even without proper information, political opponents of this Government wasted no time in distorting facts and striving to derive political mileage out of this national challenge.

The facts however, hon Deputy Speaker, indicate that it is a combination of factors, which caused unprecedented levels of these power outages. This current phase constitutes an emergency, which requires that we all take emergency steps to move the system out of its current state of seriousness.

Stabilizing the situation requires our maximum cooperation in both voluntary and mandatory programmes that will be implemented.

We call on all our people to cooperate with us in the intervention programmes. We will be taking a central lead in the mobilization of stakeholders in promoting a long-term efficient usage of electricity.

Hon Members and guests in the House will have noted that we have distributed this little pamphlet on energy-saving tips. These are things that each and everyone of us can do to save electricity and it does not require of us to go out of our way to incur additional expenses. Instead, we will be able to save on our electricity bills and we are making this plea to all of us to please help us in ensuring that we bring this current emergency situation under control. We are also going to have this pamphlet translated into the official languages of our Province so that it is much easier for people to read and implement what we are asking them to do.

During our special Premier's Coordinating Forum which was only held yesterday, we were able to adopt a holistic programme regarding this problem. This we have been able to do with the presence of our District Municipalities, our Local Municipalities, the Executive Council, the Provincial Task Team as well as Eskom and the Department of Minerals and Energy Affairs present at yesterday's PCF Meeting. The plan that we are embarking upon is a plan that involves each and every household in our Free State to ensure that we do our national effort in ensuring that we are contributing towards alleviating this emergency.

Hon Deputy Speaker, as we then come closer towards the end of term, we are confident that we have served our people well. We are equally confident that for the remainder of our time, we will move with a sense of urgency to implement programmes aimed at the improved quality of lives for the people of our Free State. "Business unusual" will take real effect this year!

We are grateful for the support received from all our social partners.

We are also very grateful for the dedication of our public servants, who go an extra mile in the service of our people. We have earlier pointed to the corrosive role of corruption in the erosion of democracy, public confidence, good governance and social stability. We will vigorously counter all corrupt practices not merely through effective rules and regulations, monitoring as well as prosecution, but we will also strengthen the political consciousness and the values associated with ubuntu.

These values of ubuntu must continue to infuse the work of all those who provide a public service so that in the pursuit of service, the interests of the people are prioritized and that any impediments to optimal public service are identified and removed.

The year 2008 is pregnant with possibilities of an accelerated advance towards our vision of a better life for all. Let us all be midwives to the delivery of a brighter future.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, hon Deputy Speaker, allow me to thank all those who have been part and parcel of this process of working towards the realization of a better life for all our people in this Province.

I want to thank the ANC for its continued support and confidence in me and my Executive Council and for continuing to trust us to do what is right for the people of the Free State.

I want to also thank the Legislature for its continued support through the Committees in the Legislature and their oversight role that they play over the Executive and our programmes, but also the work that they do with us within their communities.

I want to thank the officials in our various Departments, our HODs, our Senior Managers for your continued support and your undivided loyalty to the course that we are pursuing.

I also want to take this opportunity to say to the people of the Free State, that you have the full commitment of this Executive Council that we will continue to serve you unreservedly, that we will continue to serve you to the best of our ability and we will ensure that we only do what is best for the people of our Province.

“Business unusual” is what is going to drive us; “business unusual” is how we are going to deliver; “business unusual” is the best and the least that you as the people of the Free State can expect from us.

Last but not least, hon Deputy Speaker, my family will kick me out if I do not also say thank you to them for their continued support. They are sitting here. There is a whole Marshoff clan that is sitting there: my sister - all of them. They have travelled from quite far to give us the support. I want to say, thank you to my children. I do not have any more small children to thank, I now have grandchildren; I am a grandmother.

So, I want to say, thank you to everyone who has given me the support to do what needed to be done and released me from other duties as a mother, grandmother and so on. I think you must continue to do just that for us.

Then, last but not least, it might be late, but I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone of you a happy St Valentine’s Day. I hope Valentine has delivered his promises and that it was “Business unusual” for him as well. And those of you, who do not have a Valentine, do not feel neglected. At least it is a leap year and the women at least have an opportunity to do the unusual thing this year, which is to propose!

Thank you, very much.