



1999 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER IW DIREKO

Friday, 6 August 1999

Mr Speaker and Deputy Speaker,
Members of the Executive Council,
Members of the Provincial Legislatures and National Assembly,
Chairperson of the Free State Local Government Association(FRELOGA),
Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders,
Judge President Lichtenburg,
Police Commissioner, Mr Alberts,
Correctional Services Commissioner, Damons,
Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Grobler,
Distinguished Representatives of Labour and Business Communities,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today marks the beginning of a new era characterised by our determination to accelerate change and service delivery.

We are gathered in Bloemfontein a city, rich in history. This is the city where the founding fathers of unity across all our people and tribes gathered. We owe it to these forebears, Mahabane, Rubusana, Maphikela and others, that our approach and style of work is characterised by unity in this province.

We are assembled here today on the eve of the All Africa Games in September - a few days before the anniversary celebrations of the National Women's Day, which is the last as we enter the 21st century.

A couple of days ago, the Southern Africa Development Community and Ministers of Local Government converged in Johannesburg to discuss ways in which local government could be strengthened across the region, as well as accelerating the active involvement of women in local government.

When our people voted on the 2nd June 1999 general elections, they guaranteed our advance to meet the objectives of creating "A better life for all".

The ANC-led Government speaks for the interests of the workers of this country. We are confident that the current wage negotiations between Government and the labour movements will be resolved amicably in the best interests of all so that all of us can march forward with the acceleration of the transformation process.

Hon Deputy Speaker, we owe to all our people, the obligation to recommit the Government to the construction of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and transparent society. I pledge to do all this with the authority at my command.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we thank the IEC Commissioners and staff for the sterling work they have done under trying and difficult conditions. We feel encouraged that the IEC was a very effective vehicle despite the numerous court cases it faced and the major stumbling blocks experienced, which at some stages threatened to derail the election process.

On behalf of the people of the Free State, we salute the Provincial IEC for the good work they have done in ensuring the smooth running of elections in the province. I salute Mr Chris Mepha and his entire team, along with hundreds of civil servants who volunteered their time to ensure free-and-fair elections.

As Government, hon Deputy Speaker, we have experienced a series of debilitating conflicts in the past term of government.

There are people, both old and new members in the public service and some outside the public service, who are bent on disrupting the smooth running of Government.

I must make it clear, that your Government will take all the necessary steps to ensure that these elements fail to destabilise the Free State. None of us should hesitate to expose these rogue and corrupt elements from within our communities.

As I indicated on the occasion of my inauguration as Premier of the Province, I invite all citizens of the Free State to contact me directly to inform me on civil servants, politicians, members in our communities who may be involved in corrupt and illegal activities.

In this county, we must uproot, enemy number 1, which is corruption and laziness wherever they exist in our system. Corruption cannot be tolerated. The emphasis must be on the empowering the ordinary men and women on the ground – and corruption robs them off that privilege. So, we need to stand together, if we do nothing else during our term of Office, but to eradicate corruption once and for all.

In the past five years, significant achievements have been made by the ANC-led Government in providing basic services to millions of our people, improving health care, education for the poor and developing a culture of peace and democracy. However, despite substantial advances, we have not sufficiently transformed the structures and ownership of the economy. We have Government, but not the wealth of the country in our pockets.

The fundamental transformation of the state and crime – crime continues to be a very unnecessary evil, which together, we must remove at all levels.

During the five years term of this government, the province will be faced with the following major challenges:

- To accelerate the process of delivery of services and improving the living conditions of our people. Those are the expectations that we raised, hence a clear mandate to go ahead and govern this country;
- To alleviate poverty as we put on our suits; as we wear our ties, we must always remember the people out there who are expecting a helping hand from us in Government;

- To stimulate economic growth and job creation; and this challenge, we hope we can meet with commitment and contributions from all sectors of the Free State, specifically business, agriculture and others;
- To transform the state and deepen democracy, and
- Fight against crime and corruption.

These challenges will serve as the Government's policy framework within which the Free State Provincial Government will fulfill its responsibilities in pursuit of achieving the reconstruction and development of the Free State and our country.

The Executive Council has emerged from a recent *Bosberaad* determined to provide a co-operative and collaborative leadership if we are to meet the above challenges.

We reconfirm the priorities of the province as:

- Housing and Infrastructural development;
- Economic development and job creation; and
- Human resource development.

These will be pursued vigorously through the strategies that we as an Executive Council, have agreed upon at the *Bosberaad*.

We will not succeed if our economic transformation does not promote access of historically disadvantaged communities to the mainstream of the economy and does not integrate rural and urban development – with special emphasis on the rural communities. Finally, the diversification of the provincial economy should be central to this process.

Government will ensure, vigorously, that our institutions are transformed so that they are service oriented and user friendly to our people. It is important, for example, that an organ such as the FDC should provide a quality services to the people wherein valid reasons are provided when requests for loans are turned down.

In a similar vein, if we are to achieve the challenges ahead, our institutions - the FDC and departments must be responsive to the needs of the communities they are meant to serve. Unless these institutions treat people with the respect they deserve, we will not be able to deliver a quality service that puts people first – *Batho Pele!*

It is expected that the type of services we provide to our people, such as houses we build, are of a high quality and acceptable standards. We cannot accept a situation where people's houses are of such poor quality that they spend more money renovating them instead of enjoying the security and comfort of their homes. We must be efficient and cost-effective in the quality of services we provide to our people.

The society we seek to establish should be people-centred and caring. However, it is essential that while Government is prepared to assist people in creating a better life for all, those that received loans from the FDC, must continue servicing them to enable Government to assist a broader section to benefit from such a service. People must take responsibility for their actions.

People should not be mere recipients of a better life, but they must also be active participants in the creation of a better life for themselves.

Moenie net hand uitsteek en vra nie.

Do something to improve your own situation.

As we speak, Local Government is undergoing major changes that include the demarcation around the country. The process will lead to the reduction in the number of municipalities and councilors. The purpose of which is to create more economically viable municipalities that will be able to execute their constitutional obligation to provide local democracy and deliver services to their communities.

Toward the end of next year we will be going to local government elections under this new system. It is appropriate that in the Free State, as it is done everywhere else, we must begin now to prepare ourselves for this huge task.

However, I remain deeply troubled by the serious problems facing our local municipalities.

I will be urging the MEC for Local Government and Housing and the Free State Local Government Association (FRELOGA) to collaborate and intensify their campaign to rid municipalities of the problems they experience.

We are aware that they will not succeed without the active and constructive contribution of local communities.

Amongst other ways, community contributions may be sought, could be in the area of the formulation of integrated development plans and land development objectives for municipalities.

The Provincial Government will be working closely with National Government to ensure that municipalities and all departments in the province are year 2000 compliant. This is essential in ensuring that none of the gains we have made so far, are lost and services to communities are negatively affected. We urge business to play critical supportive role to our municipalities in this regard.

Business must put back into local government and communities what they get out of members of those communities.

Over 10 000 subsidies have been approved by the Provincial Housing Board for the 1999/2000 Financial Year and all the houses will be built on or before 31 March 2000. More than a thousand houses will also be built before that date for the elderly. We owe them this. They contributed to the economy of the country at the mid-day of their lives - persons with disabilities and all this will be done in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare.

Hon Deputy Speaker, let me take this opportunity to encourage business and organised labour to take advantage of the innovative *Makhulong* Home Loan Scheme, which seeks to ensure greater numbers of those employed, have access to finance and thus are in a position to house their families. Housing provision is not only a great job creator, but it is also critical in boosting local economies in the provision of a safer and healthier environment.

However, it is critical that those who take loans must ensure that these are promptly repaid so that others too could be able to benefit from such a scheme. It is totally unacceptable and pretty selfish to refuse to repay what you owe. It is in fact, irresponsible.

I will be working in collaboration with the Department of Local Government to strengthen our relationship, with the House of Traditional Leaders so that we provide support towards communities for development. It is our intention to work closely and regularly with Traditional Leaders to identify obstacles that hinder the work between Traditional Leaders and elected public representatives at the local level.

The challenge of reconstruction and development of our country into one that guarantees human dignity faces the entirety of our people – and not a section of our people.

The Government, therefore, commits itself to work in close partnership with all our people to ensure that we accelerate delivery of services they so rightfully deserve.

I invite all those in our province who occupy positions of authority and responsibility, in the churches, business, labour, public service and in communities, to join hands with Government in new ways of doing things. We urge these leaders to join in partnership with Government in the fight against poverty, crime, corruption, to help in the moral renewal of our country.

I would like to take this opportunity once more to reiterate the commitment of our Government to honesty, transparency and accountability.

As a province, we are committed to building a competitive, fast-growing economy that will create sustainable employment and lead to the redistribution of the province's wealth and an improvement in the standards of living of all our people.

To achieve this goal, the province must shift from exporting raw materials to manufacturing value-added, globally competitive products. Export led economic growth would go a long way in ensuring that we achieve our goals.

Strong demand exists for manufactured products, as the depreciation of the Rand makes the prices of South African goods relatively cheap on the international markets. The growth in manufactured products results in companies making increased use of their existing manufacturing capacity and even the opening of new production lines. South Africa's exports in the six months to June, rose by 14% to R78,70 billion from R68,99 billion in the same period last year.

I will be honouring the efforts of Free State Exporters by hosting the "*Premier's Award for Export Excellence*". This will serve to reward and encourage exporters for their efforts in developing the Free State economy. This event - a pilot for similar incentive projects will be held in October this year.

This is the first event of its kind to be held in the Province. I believe that this will also serve as a stimulus for potential exporters to get involved in international trade and put the province on the competitive edge in the market.

As Government, we will continue to give priority to the issue of job creation.

Job creation, the opening up of opportunities for all our people to earn an honest livelihood as well as the protection of the rights of all our working people, remain matters of critical concern to all of us.

I am privileged to announce a number of key initiatives that this government has and will undertake to build the economy of the Free State and thus create the much needed jobs:

- **Via D'Oro:** – progress on this hollow gold chain manufacturer (focussed on the export market) has been significant and the company has employed approximately 360 people, mainly women, from the local region. This number is set to increase to approximately 850 as orders are generated.
- **South African Jewellery Academy:** – the business plan for the venture is currently being finalised and plans are being put in place to enroll the first students early next year. The project has the support of the following organisations and institutions: The mine MINTEK; National Union of Mine Workers; Department of Trade & Industry; ICP Group; FDC and the Virginia Local Council.
- I am happy to announce that the United Nations Office has approved R6 million for Project Services for the establishment of the academy.
- **Cento Initiative:** – the company has, over the past few years, explored opportunities of getting involved in a joint venture with Cento, an Italian jewellery manufacturer in order to establish manufacturing facilities in the region. Whilst creating valuable job opportunities, the jewellery manufactured will mainly be directed at the export market.
- **Jewellery Manufacturing Hub:** – to support the mainstream initiatives mentioned above, the area should be promoted to attract independent jewellery manufacturers. A well-known jewellery craftsman, Mr Bridggy Ramasike has already relocated to Virginia and has started manufacturing products for the local and export markets
- **Harmony Gold Refinery:** - the refinery in Virginia, being the second of only two refineries in the country, is producing value-added products that are currently being sold in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. More specifically, the 99,99% pure granules used for jewellery manufacturing are well received by the jewellery manufacturers in Europe.

The development of small, medium and micro-enterprise remains a top priority of Government. Accordingly, new initiatives will be instituted to accelerate the participation of this sector into the mainstream of the economy than it has been the case before.

To this effect, I am pleased to announce that, within three months, Government, in partnership with business will convene a Free State Economic Empowerment Conference.

It is not necessary to travel to other centres in the country – we must dip our buckets where we are.

The objective of this conference will be to provide an opportunity for black business people in the province to develop a common understanding regarding appropriate strategies and mechanisms to achieve the aims of integrating black business into the mainstream of the economy.

We as government will facilitate the establishment of the Free State Economic Forum. The purpose of this forum will be to afford organised business a platform and opportunity to provide the Provincial Government with insight of their needs, initiatives and aspirations.

We are well aware that some of the companies engage in corrupt and illegal activities. Information at our disposal clearly indicates that whilst there are genuine people, there are those who present blacks as fronts for preferential tendering on Government contracts in the name of black economic empowerment. They serve the interests of their masters, and not the upliftment of the historically disadvantaged black business.

Therefore, I re-iterate the commitment of Government to assist this sector to join into the mainstream of the economy and not perpetually remain SMMEs.

As part of our commitment to the African Renaissance and the building of our provincial economy, one of the challenges remains that the development and growth of our economy is linked to our neighbours in Lesotho.

Not only do we share borders with the people of Lesotho. We share a history and culture that spans generations. We are bonded together by issues of environment, education and the scourge of crime.

It would be imperative for members of business in the Free State to actively explore investment opportunities that may exist in Lesotho, which investments will be for the mutual benefit of our countries and the people. In that regard, we should foster relations that go beyond our Governments, but should nurture business relations as well as citizens' relations.

To give concrete measures to these commitments, I will lead a delegation to the Kingdom of Lesotho in the near future to explore the possibility of initiatives that could be implemented at intergovernmental relations, business sector, cultural, and educational levels.

We will have to market this province such that we are able to visibly see visitors utilizing to full capacity of our hotels, lodges, restaurants, resorts, and other tourist facilities. We want to see the creation of these facilities as more visitors visit this province. It is through such increase in demand for our facilities that this sector will be able to meet the challenges of job creation.

We shall also continue to improve our reserves and resorts such that they meet the standards and expectations of tourists. In that regard, Government is putting top priority to the development of Eco-park in *Soetdoring* and *Vredefort* dome in the Northern District Council. We also need to ensure that our transport system, roads, signage (sic), tourism route development are conducive to the flourishing of tourism in the province.

Hon Speaker, the European Union - South Africa will be signed next year. Our agricultural stakeholders need to take advantage of the opening in trade as a result of the opening in trade. We already export goods from the province and that is reason enough to believe we can do more.

The Free State Government is particularly concerned about farmers and the farming community in general. Recognising the need to expend our energy and time, we need to take advantage of the emerging opportunities as part of our integration into the world economy.

We are on the eve of a new millenium, and as never before, the people of our country need Government Officials to serve them with unquestioned integrity. Corruption of public servants

and politicians betrays their trust. Corruption cannot co-exist with the rule of law and democracy.

Corruption misallocates resources, hurts the poor and destroys the moral fibre of our society. We must act against corrupt individuals, organisations and institutions.

When people do not pay for their services, that negatively affects the ability of Government to accelerate the delivery of basic services. When business evades tax, Government will not be able to deliver on basic services. When people demand loans from Government and refuse to pay back, they affect the ability of Government to deliver.

Our people must take full responsibility for their actions.

I pledge in that regard to work with agencies such as the Public Protector, the Health Special Investigating Unit, the Auditor General, to uproot corrupt activities wherever they rear their head in this province.

Since 1994, there has been a marked decline in all-serious crime such as murder, robbery, car hijacking and others in the Free State. This is evidenced by the fact that at least 80% of all crimes committed on the farms have resulted in the apprehension of criminals – because those farmers provide jobs; they provide food for this province - hence we can talk with confidence that crime on the farms has been put under control.

I noted with concern on television that these attacks on farmers had increased – statistics are given, but I am sure in the Free State, I can speak with confidence that there has been a relative decrease in that area.

There is a tendency though, to exaggerate and distort the reality of crime in this country and the province for pure sensational reasons.

As a Government, we will do everything to implement efficiently and effectively the National Crime prevention strategy, in particular by focusing on:

- Enhancing greater capacity for the Community Policing Forums
- Ensuring effective crime prevention, and
- Encouraging discipline within the Police Service.

It is unfortunate that some of the police who are supposed to be combating crime are perpetrators of it. It is important to note that other police arrested these rogue elements within the Police Service.

There are good police officers and they need the support of all of us. Our hon Minister, two days ago, complimented these good police officers for the work that they render in this province and assured them of his love and caring for them. Therefore, we also want to compliment and encourage them to root out the bad elements within the Police Service.

As I indicated earlier about how peaceful our elections were, there have been disturbing events particularly in farming areas.

Dis ontstellend dat plaaswerkers in sommige gevalle geviktimiseer is omdat hulle tydens die verkiesing van 2 Junie gaan stem het. Volskaalse afdanking van werkers en uitsetting uit plase waar hulle gewoon het, gaan onverpoosd voort.

Sekuriteit op die plase is afhanklik van die samewerking tussen die boere en hul plaaswerkers. Uitsetting van plaaswerkers en afdankings is nie bevorderlik vir die skep van 'n klimaat van samewerking nie.

As a result, I will be approaching the Legislature to establish a special select *ad hoc* committee to investigate the conditions of farm workers in the Free State, in particular:

- The allegations of expulsions of farm workers as a result of their participation in the elections,
- Illegal evictions, and
- General conditions under which farm workers live and work.

Some farmers are particularly very good in this area. As you travel around the Free State, they have put up descent houses for their farm workers and they look after them as well as is humanly possible. However, there are areas that we need to look into.

This committee will work in consultation with labour unions, civil society, Transitional Rural Councils, Organised farmers like the Farmers' Union and will present its recommendations to me within 4 months of assuming its duties.

Hon Deputy Speaker, in some cases, we have experienced difficulties with regard to the disbursement of old age pensions.

The problem regarding the disbursement of old age pensions derived from:

- Firstly, ghost recipients that were exposed by our social pensions audit system;
- Secondly, anti-corruption measures exposed Government Officials as accepting bribes at pay-points,
- Thirdly, the non-citizens who were drawing pensions in the province, and
- Fourthly, the appalling conditions of long queues, robberies that the elderly are subjected to when they go to receive their pensions.

I will be urging the MEC for Social Welfare to look at the ways of improving the conditions of pensioners. I would expect a report on concrete steps to be taken to improve their conditions to be tabled to me within three months.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, the implementation of free and compulsory education is a priority for the Free State Provincial Government. To implement free and compulsory education, it is necessary for parents, school management and all stakeholders to have a common understanding of the meaning of "free and compulsory education" and an understanding of our role in this regard.

Every parent or guardian is responsible to see to it that the child attends school from the first day of the year in which such a learner reaches the age of seven years until the last school day of the year in which such a learner turns fifteen or reaches the ninth grade.

In the system of free and compulsory education, the SA Schools Act further states that parents are required to pay school fees as determined by a resolution taken by the majority of the parents attending the general meeting of the school governing body. So, this condition is not being forced on parents, it is a voluntary gesture from parents.

However, the Free State Provincial Government is committed to seeing to it that no learner is turned away from a public school because the parents cannot afford to pay. A parent who cannot afford to pay school fees should make proper arrangements with the school governing body for a partial or a conditional exemption from payment of school fees as arranged in terms of Section 39 of the Schools Act.

Our priority is to ensure that all our learners learn, all our teachers teach – that is why they are called teachers. Their business is to teach. I bet there are teachers in the audience. That is why we urge parents to take an active interest in matters of the school governing bodies and general education for their children.

We are also requesting help and assistance of parents to ensure that their children take their studies seriously – schools are not waiting rooms, they are offered to our school children to offer education to them, and furthermore, parents have a duty to alert the department about inadequate learning and teaching systems.

Textbooks must be delivered to schools on time.

I will request the hon MEC for Education and the Management of the department to ensure that by the end of this year, all schools must have received their textbooks and stationery within fail.

Otherwise, if this does not happen, heads will roll.

You can deceive some people all the time, you can deceive all the people for sometime, but you cannot deceive all the people all the time.

We cannot go back to parents, to communities to offer excuses why books have not been delivered on time. Even if you have to work for 24 hours a day, that has to be done, because this area of concern must be addressed.

This matter has been a concern of the former State President, Mr Mandela, and I know that it is an important matter of concern to President Mbeki.

We need the co-operation of our learners, teachers and parents to ensure that textbooks are retrieved at the end of each academic year. Parents must make sure that their children return textbooks to school. Teachers must keep a proper record of books that have been given out. Management must see to it that teachers carry out this instruction. We do not have buckets of money to buy new books each year. Our children must be trained to respect the books that they get from school so that they grow up respecting public property – and that is the duty of your department, Sir, management and your teachers – supported of course, by the parents.

I encourage the Department of Education to embark on an intensive retraining programme for all managers, which will result in systematic improvements regarding effective management of our education system.

Given the ruling party's current emphasis on accelerating change and its commitment to improving the lives of the majority of all Free Staters, the Executive Council has identified infrastructure development as a priority in the province. This has necessitated fundamental organisational transformation of the Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport as part of the Government's key policy imperative of transforming the public service. Public Service must be improved, because Public Service must render service to the public. That is

why it is referred to as public service – not to sit around and do nothing. You are not paid for doing nothing, you are there, because there are expectations from you.

Such a transformation will involve a rigorous promotion of public/private partnerships in which clear strategic choices will be made about key functions that will best be performed by government itself, and those that will be performed on sound commercial principles and some by possibly state-owned agencies.

The proposed transformation will seek to build on the achievements by the Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport and to improve on our failures. Amongst others, it will strive to initiate and improve its record of promoting Black Economic Empowerment initiatives.

The most recent example happened last year when Government awarded a tendered bus contract of R250 million tender over a period of five years to Interstate Bus Lines to ferry passengers between Bloemfontein, Thaba Nchu and Soutpan. Government also insisted that 20% of the contract sum be set aside for Emerging Black Bus Operators. On the 20th August 1999, Interstate Bus lines will be announcing the names of operators who will participate and benefit from this 20% stake.

The Government has also raised a concern about Maluti Bus Service in the Eastern Free State. Consequently, the Executive Council has recently resolved that the transformation of Maluti Bus Service should be initiated in order to provide a better service to the people in that area. It is therefore, expected that the second tendered bus contract will shortly be awarded in the Free State through which we hope to further improve the mobility of the people in the province. The work in this regard is already well underway. The service that is provided by Maluti Bus Service will continue until it is transformed.

The department's effort to restructure state assets at its disposal will also contribute immensely to the black economic empowerment initiatives in particular and the growth of the Free State economy in general. In pursuance of this objective, Government is currently in the process of selling houses in the De Bult area in Qwaqwa as well as to make more provincial land available for the building of houses.

I also hope that the Department's transformation programme will improve on its recent record of achieving the lowest death toll on the country's roads this past Easter Holidays. Despite difficulties in the province's traffic management section, commitment, discipline and hard work will prevail at the end of the day.

The main objective for this Department in the next five years is to ensure the provisioning and maintenance of infrastructure in order to ensure that integrated development takes place in the province. Key to this is for this Department to deliver an Integrated Public Transport Plan for the province in the next five years.

It is envisaged that the Department will transform itself in such a way that the level of efficiency will be increased, personnel costs will be reduced and funds will be freed to address these challenges. Therefore, most importantly, vehicles of that department must be looked after.

Government cars are used by government officials to do government work and at the end of a specific period within which a government official is executing government duties, that vehicle must be taken to where it belongs and not be used as taxi or to be of service in times if leisure.

Hon Deputy Speaker, an assessment of the health services in the Free State has revealed that the province has progressed well with respect to the integration of previously fragmented and segregated services. The province also has well established infrastructure that has been extensively upgraded since 1994. Further access to health care services particularly amongst those previously disadvantaged has been significantly increased.

In line with the commitment of the ANC to accelerate delivery, it is envisaged that the drive to deal with the challenges and ensure quality care will include:

- The introduction of a Patient's Charter that will spell out the rights of all patients in State facilities as well as the obligations of health workers.
- The introduction of decentralised management at health institutions to encourage greater management autonomy, which will promote more cost effective and appropriate health care services.
- A concerted effort to increase the commitment and morale of health care workers by ensuring appropriate establishments as well as fair and efficient human resource management.
- Greater control of losses from theft and damage to State property in the province by involving both officials and the general public in a programme to combat fraud and theft.

Our people in the Free State should join hands to meet the formidable challenge posed by HIV/AIDS in the province and the country at large.

The annual antenatal study indicates that 22,8% of pregnant women attending clinics are HIV positive while in hospitals, between 20% and 40% of patients are estimated to be HIV positive.

In certain hospitals, over 50% of deaths are as a result of Aids related illnesses. People who die from Aids get buried every week in this province. Aids orphans are increasing among many of our communities.

The Free State is committed to an inter-sectoral, inter-departmental strategy co-ordinated by the inter-ministerial committee of the Executive Council to ultimately reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in this province. The success of any programme will depend on total commitment from all segments of the community. We can learn much from African countries, and Uganda is a case in point.

The Department of Health will be embarking on an awareness programme across the province that will involve the youth in all of its formations.

I am pleased to announce that in due course I will convene an HIV/AIDS conference in the province. It is hoped that that conference will assist in developing strategies necessary for the province to combat the spread of the HIV Virus. We hope to contribute, with the results of our provincial conference to the international conference on HIV/AIDS to be held in Durban in the year 2000. As part of our preparations, and in consultation with the MEC of Health, we shall be meeting all Aids awareness groups, advocacy groups and affected people.

Women are the lowest of the unemployed and lowest earners in the province. When we talk about poverty alleviation, we talk of improving the lives of women.

Each department in the future must demonstrate how the budgeting process and outcome impact on the lives of women, the disabled and children. The Office on the Status of Women will be tasked with the responsibility of evaluating the impact departmental budgets have on women across all departments.

The Office of the Status of Women will present a gender audit to National Government by September. This will enable the Government to evaluate the progress achieved with regard to the implementation of the Plan of Action on Gender, which the previous government adopted. We hope that the province will benefit from this audit, and allow us to improve on the gender mainstreaming of our programmes.

This will enable us to take such decisions as may be necessary to ensure that we continue to focus on the vital question of the development and emancipation of women as well as to further integrate this issue within all Government programmes.

As our President indicated, an important project that will soon be implemented within the context of the Job Summit will be the improvement of public buildings to enhance access and use by disabled people. This initiative, elaborated by the disabled, the National Youth Commission and Public Works will be implemented soon, as part of the programme decided at the Job Summit.

More work must be undertaken to improve the conditions of the disabled. It should not merely be thousands of wheelchairs and hearing aids that are made available, but our working environment should be user-friendly for the disabled.

In this regard, I challenge all departments to ensure that at least a sizeable percentage of their staff is composed of disabled people at the end of this term of the Government.

Hon Speaker, indeed we are a nation at work. We are ready to deliver regardless of race, sex or political affiliation. Together as Free Staters we must heed the road running. I thank you.
