

**STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY PREMIER THAMSANQA NTULI
28 FEBRUARY 2025
KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE**

Luhlanga Lomhlabathi, Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of the Executive, Honourable Members of the Legislature, KwaZulu-Natal Judge President, Amakhosi aseNdlunkulu, Izinduna zamakhosi, Mayor of UMsunduzi Municipality, All our Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Speakers, All Councillors, Judges, Abaholi bamabhizinisi nabemboni yamatekisi, Religious Leaders, Ambassadors, Consul Generals, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, SAPS Provincial Commissioner, the Director-General, Heads of Departments, Learners from Long Market Primary School, Msilinga Primary School, Merchiston Primary School, Orient Heights Primary School, Media, Fellow Citizens.

Recently we lost our Sons in the DRC, which we are relieved that their mortal remains are back to the land of their birth to be given a befitting send-off.

As a Province once again, we lost fellow citizens and infrastructure due to heavy rains and floods. Recent reports indicated that we lost 11 people.

I therefore request that we all observe a moment of silence in their remembrance.

Njengaminyaka yonke, izolo sicoshe amanoni enkulumeni yoNgangezwe Lakhe, nesizibophezelayo njengo Hulumeni weSILO ukuthi amagama aso ngeke awele phansi. Ngiselapho SILO ngiyafisa ukwedlulisa ukuthokoza.

1. Kusuka ngoZibandlela ngonyaka owedlule ISILO sibe nohambo olumqoka kuso nase sizweni jikelele. Lolu hambo bekuwu Mkhosi woSelwa ongumongo kaZulu. Kube yintokozo nokuziqhenya kithi ukuthi OMdala ekukhuphukeni kwakhe entabeni, abuye engumqemane nokwenze wawagcina onke amasiko namasikothi aqondene naloMkhosi.

Madam Speaker

2. We are indeed living in unprecedented times. We face a future marked by the uncertainties of a global climate crisis, alongside enormous challenges in health, social stability, economic resilience and geo-politics. The waves of pandemics, epidemics, and endemic diseases serve as stark reminders of the vulnerabilities we must address. By all accounts, we are navigating through a period of profound crisis.
3. Yet, it was that legendary statesman, the former Prime Minister of Britain, Winston Churchill, who reminded us, 'Never let a good crisis go to waste.' In his words, we find a powerful call to action—a reminder that even in times of hardship, there lies an opportunity for growth, transformation, and renewed purpose.
4. As we end the month of February, we mark eight months since the dawn of the 7th Administration—a period defined by commitment, engagement, and the pursuit of progress. This journey has been both a privilege and a profound learning experience as we have dedicated our time to listening, understanding, and working alongside our people from all walks of life.
5. At the heart of this administration is a deep and unwavering commitment to serving our nation with integrity, responsiveness, and a clear vision for a better future. Through continuous engagement with communities, businesses, workers, and civil society, we have gained invaluable insights that will shape the policies and programmes driving our collective progress.
6. As we move forward, we remain steadfast in our mission to build an inclusive, prosperous, and resilient society, one where every citizen has the opportunity to contribute and thrive.
7. We stand before this august House today to account, to report on the commitments we made and the actions we have taken in pursuit of a better future for our people. In my maiden State of the Province Address, **we committed to inspiring new hope** both inside and outside of government. We also pledged to lead a

government founded on honesty, accountability, and service. Over the past eight months, we have engaged extensively with stakeholders across government, business, labour, and civil society. We have reviewed reports, examined projections, and gained a deeper understanding of the challenges that confront us.

8. We remain resolute in our mission to build a government that is responsive, transparent, and driven by the needs of the people. This is not just a promise, it is a responsibility that we will continue to uphold. Today, we stand before you to speak candidly, not only about the challenges we face but, also about the progress we have made, the rationale behind our decisions, and the critical steps that still lie ahead.

Madame Speaker

9. Our administration governs in a time shaped by both internal and global economic realities. When we assumed office eight months ago, we were confronted with the stark fiscal constraints facing KwaZulu-Natal. As the Government of Provincial Unity, we inherited outstanding financial commitments from the 2023/2024 financial year, obligations that weighed upon the budget of 2024/2025.
10. Despite these challenges, we remain resolute in our commitment to prudent financial management, ensuring that every rand spent serves the people and advances our shared vision for economic stability and inclusive growth. In confronting the fiscal challenges before us, the Executive Council has taken decisive action. Recognizing the need for responsible financial management, we collectively agreed on a cost-cutting initiative designed to help departments navigate financial constraints—some of which are beyond their control. This initiative is not merely about reducing expenditures; it is about enhancing financial planning, ensuring fiscal accountability, and safeguarding service delivery.
11. Across the globe, governments face the difficult task of balancing cost containment with developmental imperatives. Trade-offs are inevitable, but our approach has been strategic: ensuring that while we streamline expenditure, we do not

compromise essential services. We are pleased to report that, within a short period, these measures are already yielding positive results in KwaZulu-Natal.

Further details on these fiscal adjustments will be outlined by MEC for Finance, Honourable Rogers in his forthcoming budget presentation.

Madam Speaker,

12. We are collectively working hard to stabilise our province.

KwaZulu-Natal is a province of rich diversity, immense potential, and vibrant communities. Yet, we are acutely aware of the challenges we face—high unemployment rate, deepening poverty, rising costs of living, service delivery gaps, and the lingering impacts of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and economic volatility.

13. But amid these challenges, there is hope. Hope is rooted in the resilience of our people, the strength of our institutions, and the untapped potential that exists within our province. Our role here today is to turn all of the above into inspiring new hope through concrete strategies, bold leadership, and decisive implementation.

14. The Province's economy shows early signs of recovery, though following a path of modest inclusive growth. While we see encouraging indicators - including gradual declines in inflation and interest rates, along with slightly increased international reserves - our provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth remains below target and expectation.

15. Job creation continues to be a critical challenge, with unemployment exceeding 30 percent. The youth face hardship, with two out of three young people unable to secure productive employment.

16. Our social indicators reflect persistent challenges: many citizens live below the food poverty line, and wealth inequality remains stark, with a Gini co-efficient of

0.62. The disparity is evident as the top 10% of our population spends nearly six times more than the bottom 40%.

17. However, recent developments give us reason for cautious optimism. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) survey on public perception shows a notable rise in optimism regarding the province's direction. Citizens express satisfaction with social grants, housing, and education services. While unemployment, poverty and service delivery concerns remain our greatest challenge, citizens' feedback guides our priorities for action.

18. It is encouraging that four out of ten KZN citizens recognize government's efforts to attract international investment and manage the economy.

Madam Speaker

19. In the 2024 State of the Province Address in this august House, I made firm commitments to the people of KwaZulu-Natal. Today, I am pleased to report tangible progress.

20. From the outset, this administration has been committed **to fostering sustainable dialogue** on the most pressing challenges affecting our communities. In the reporting period two critical dialogues were facilitated, mainly crime, gender based violence and taxi industry conflicts.

21. We recognise that without law and order, there can be no investment, no economic growth, and no social progress. Over the past eight months, we have initiated critical interventions. From the **Social Crime Prevention Summit held on 02 August 2024**, to direct **engagements with communities deeply affected by crime**, such as Osizweni, eMangwaneni, uMsunduzi, Inanda, Esikhaleni and Gamalakhe we have actively sought solutions that are informed by the experiences of our people. As a result of dialogues on crime, a Council Against Crime was launched in February 2025. This is an essential platform in our collective fight against lawlessness. As government, we recognise that the battle against crime cannot be won in isolation. It requires the expertise of specialists, the vigilance of civil society, and the unwavering commitment of all sectors of our society.

22. Within the same reporting period, we also **engaged stakeholders in the transport industry to address among other things, permit disputes and other related challenges**. Engagements were held with SANTACO, KwaNabaco, and SABOA. Roadshows were also held in various districts in the Province. In response to issues raised we streamlined the processing of operating licenses, thus reducing turnaround times.
23. Several disputes within the taxi industry were mediated. These included Ulundi, Phongolo, Ikhwezi Local and Long-Distance Taxi Association as well as Durban Long Distance Taxi Association.
24. There were other dialogues addressing issues of youth and gender-based violence that I will touch upon later.
25. These engagements are not symbolic; they are shaping policy, informing enforcement strategies, and strengthening our partnerships in the fight against crime and gender-based violence and femicide as well as youth empowerment. We are moving from words to action, from commitments to concrete change.

SILO SOMHLABA

26. Eight months ago, I made a solemn commitment to elevate the role of our traditional leaders and institutions. This was not merely a policy decision but a reaffirmation of our deeply held belief that traditional leadership is an integral pillar of governance.
27. Our history has shown that the wisdom, customs, and authority of traditional leaders are indispensable in fostering social cohesion, preserving our cultural heritage, and ensuring effective governance at the grassroots level. It is for this reason that we have embarked on a path to strengthen their role, not as a parallel structure, but as a fundamental partner in our democratic dispensation.

28. Today, we stand resolute in our mission to bridge the gap between traditional leadership and the modern state—ensuring that governance is truly reflective of the people’s identity, aspirations, and lived realities. Our commitment remains unwavering, and together, we shall forge a future where tradition and progress walk hand in hand.
29. Kulezi zinyanga ezi-8 silandele uhlelo kanjalo neqhingasu likahulumeni ekusimamiseni izindaba zokubusa noBukhosi. Lolu hlelo neqhingasu akuyona imfihlo. Njengohulumeni wakwaZulu-Natal sibuka uBukhosi kusuka kwiSILO saMabandla, aMakhosi ezizwe nezinhlaka zoBukhosi njengesithako esimqoka ekuvuseleleni ithemba kulesi sifundazwe. Sibuka uBukhosi njengengxenye yokubusa.
30. Kungalesi sizathu njengeSigungu Sokuphatha sinqume ukuba okokuqala ngqa ubuholi beNdlu yaMakhosi KwaZulu-Natal busebenze ngokuphelele, nsukuzonke. Lokhu sikwenze nje ezinyangeni eziyisikhombisa siphethe.
31. Asigcinanga lapho kepha siqale uhlelo lokuhlela kabusha ukusebenza nokuhlomula kwezinduna. Kuningi SILO okusemgodleni okusazolekelela uBukhosi.
32. Esigabeni sami njengoNdunankulu wesifundazwe, nginohlelo lokulekelela ISILO nehhovisi laso ukuze konke ukusebenza kwehhovisi kuhambisane nezikhathi esikuzo. Ngiyathokoza ukubika ukuthi ISILO sikwamukele lokhu kungenelela. Imininingwane ephilelele izokwethulwa uma sesethula isabelomali somnyango kaNdunankulu emasontweni ezayo.
33. Khona lapho ngiyafisa ukutusa ubuholi beNkosi uShinga ekukhuphuleni isithunzi seNdlu Yabaholi boMdabu KwaZulu-Natal nakuzwelonke. Ezingxoxweni esibe nazo neNkosi uShinga sivumelene ngesidingo sokubambisana kukho konke okwakha isifundazwe sethu. Kanjalo nakuwo aMakhosi ezizwe nezinhlaka zoBukhosi siyalitusa igalelo lenu ekuphakamiseni iSihlalo kanjalo namasiko ethu.

34. As part of improving the safety of Amakhosi, we have implemented the following measures:

- ✓ Wi-fi Connectivity and CCTV cameras were installed for 15 Amakhosi to improve their safety and 16 Amakhosi at high risk were provided with personal protection.
- ✓ 120 members of safety structures were trained, to promote safety in the areas of 38 Amakhosi at risk.

However, we do acknowledge that more still needs to be done.

35. On safeguarding the local economy and tackling illegal economic activities, our commitment to addressing the issue of illegal foreign nationals operating unlawfully within our borders has been unwavering. This Administration approaches the matter not through the lens of xenophobia or Afrophobia, but as a fundamental responsibility to protect the integrity of our local economy—a duty we undertake without hesitation or apology.

36. In response to the above, we launched **a decisive and far-reaching campaign called, “*Ongangeni Ngesango Uyafohla*”**. Through this initiative, in collaboration with the South African Police Service and local municipalities, from 14 October 2024 to 14 November 2024, we conducted unannounced inspections of spaza shops and wholesale businesses. What we uncovered was deeply concerning. It became abundantly clear that economic activity in many of these areas has shifted away from our local entrepreneurs, with some businesses operating in direct violation of our laws—engaging in illicit trade and other criminal activities that threaten the well-being of our communities.

37. While much attention has been placed on spaza shops, let it be known that they are not the sole entities implicated in these transgressions. Some of the wholesale operations—were also found to be in violation of our laws, including blatant cases of child labour and the employment of illegal foreign workers in positions that should rightfully be filled by our own people.

38. As a result, a joint operation was conducted: and a total of 7,729 premises were inspected, 337 premises consequently closed, 142 arrests made, 2,429 compliance notices and 480 fines issued, and 10,210 kg illicit goods confiscated.

39. We commend the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, under the leadership of the Minister, Honourable Velenkosini Hlabisa, for the publication of the *Standard Draft By-Law for Township Economies*. This initiative marked an exciting yet challenging moment, as it invited us to reflect on the potential of township and rural economies.

40. It is our firm belief that the township and rural economy in KwaZulu-Natal plays a vital role in both economic growth and job creation for local communities, with substantial value and employment opportunities across informal sectors like: spaza shops, street vendors, and small-scale manufacturing.

41. The 2024 Township Economy Survey recorded that the township economy in KwaZulu-Natal is valued at R7,3 billion, with untapped innovation and entrepreneurial potential, that reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of township residents.

42. In the coming weeks, MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Honourable Zondi will provide a comprehensive report on the progress of the spaza shop registration process in KwaZulu-Natal.

On PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES FOR 2025

Madam Speaker,

43. On the 6th of February 2025, in his State of the Nation Address, His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a decisive step in our country's developmental journey: the adoption of the Medium-Term Development Plan—a clear and ambitious roadmap for the next five years.

This plan is anchored in three strategic priorities that will guide our collective efforts:

- ✓ First, to **drive inclusive growth and create jobs**—because a strong and dynamic economy is the foundation of a prosperous nation.
- ✓ **Second**, to **reduce poverty and address the high cost of living**—ensuring that all South Africans can live with dignity.
- ✓ **Third**, to **build a capable, ethical, and developmental state**—one that delivers efficiently, transparently, and in the best interest of the people.

44. As His Excellency affirmed, **our most urgent task is to grow the economy**—to unlock opportunities for employment, to uplift communities, and to improve the lives of all South Africans. This cannot be achieved without a **government that serves the people**—a state that is **efficient, accountable, and committed to excellence**.

45. Linked to these national priorities, as KwaZulu-Natal we came up with eight focus areas, namely:

- ✓ Rebuilding the economy
- ✓ Strengthening local government and governance
- ✓ Sustainable development
- ✓ Improving healthcare and education
- ✓ Delivering better human settlement and infrastructure
- ✓ Improving community safety
- ✓ Mitigating climate change
- ✓ Building a capable, ethical and developmental state

46. These eight focus areas will be crystalized and detailed when the different MECs present their budget policy statements and plans. In ensuring social accountability, the MTDP document will be translated in three languages, namely Isizulu, English and Afrikaans. This will also be translated into braille.

PRIORITY 1: GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS

47. In response to Priority 1 of the Government of National Unity we have developed a number of interventions for the next five years.

48. KwaZulu-Natal's economy holds immense potential, with strategic assets such as the Durban and Richards Bay ports, rich agricultural resources, a thriving tourism and heritage sector, and emerging opportunities in the digital economy.

49. As part of stimulating economic growth we held the **KZN Investment Conference in November 2024 resulted in 16 companies** pledging R75.8 billion for various projects, including the R15 billion Westown mixed-use development in Shongweni and SAPPI Southern Africa's R10.8 billion upgrades.
50. The Province through Trade Investment KwaZulu-Natal has set a target of securing investments worth R4 billion in the 2025/26 financial year. These investments are expected to generate 5,000 potential jobs, significantly addressing unemployment and improving livelihoods across the province. Business expansions projects for 2025/26 are valued at R1.1 billion

On Infrastructure Development

51. Last year we reported R1.4 billion earmarked for construction projects in Trade Zone 2 at Dube Tradeport, the Ogihara SA manufacturing facility at Trade Zone 2 is 85% complete, with a 5,000m² warehouse 67% completed. Dube TradePort Growth: Focused investment in logistics, agro-processing, and high-value manufacturing.
52. It has successfully secured R4.6 billion in private-sector investments and created over 5,000 permanent jobs and 51,000 indirect jobs.
53. In the coming year the Dube Tradeport's focus will be on increased investments of R500 million private sector funding and job creation with potential of 1,250 new permanent jobs and 250 temporary jobs.
54. Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ): Expansion of industrial sites to attract investors and drive manufacturing growth.
- ✓ The **Nyanza Light Metals** project in the RBIDZ has commenced with the site preparation towards the construction of the commercial plant. Funding secured is to the value of R116 million and site clearance is 81% complete as of January 2025. The construction will commence in July 2025, creating more than 3000 construction jobs.

55. We have recently welcomed an investment of over R7 billion with **LNG Projects** supported by joint investment from TNPA and Zululand Energy Terminals Consortium in Richards Bay. This will create over 1200 job opportunities for the benefit of local people. This confirms that indeed KwaZulu-Natal is becoming a leading ecosystem hub that will attract much needed investment and create jobs in our province.
56. We continue to see further investment and growth with **Wilmar Processing SA** (Pty) Ltd which had initially intended to invest R1,1 billion (\$60.4 million) with preliminary indications of the investment value increasing to more than R2 billion at the end of phase 2.
57. Automotive Supply Parks, strengthening Cato Ridge Freight and Logistics Hub to support vehicle manufacturing and logistics
58. The following urban Development and Property Investments projects are being implemented through partnership with the private sector:
- ✓ Durban Bay Waterfront Development: Major mixed-use precinct to revitalize the Durban Inner-City economy and attract investment.
 - ✓ Cornubia Integrated Development: Continued expansion of residential, commercial, and industrial precincts.
 - ✓ Shongweni Mixed-Use Development: 2000-hectare project comprising retail, logistics, and residential zones.
 - ✓ Virginia Airport Redevelopment: Transforming the site into a luxury tourism and residential hub to boost economic activity.
59. The Province under Department of Works and Infrastructure completed 70 capital projects out of 100 with 5000 jobs created.
60. Through the 'Build KZN Better Conference' we held in January 2025; we were able to create a platform for possible Public Private Partnership. The Conference identified key areas for interventions including, the repurposing of unused government buildings.

61. Another important milestone within the construction sector is the establishment of the KwaZulu-Natal Women in Construction Advisory Committee. The task of this Committee amongst other things is to facilitate active and meaningful participation of women in this industry.

62. We are committed to transforming the property and real estate sector to include marginalized communities and prevent monopolization of government leases. A turnaround strategy for lease agreements was implemented. Measures introduced to enhance transformation include:

- ✓ Equitable Opportunity Distribution,
- ✓ Promoting involvement of Black Africans within the property leasing sector and other marginalized groups (including women, people with disabilities, and youth) by requiring lessors to partner with these groups,
- ✓ Lease enforcement and strengthening of compliance measures
- ✓ Implementing longer lease periods to maximize benefits for emerging lessors.

Transport Infrastructure to connect the Province.

63. Today, our province boasts 8775.33 km of surfaced road network and 25727.33 km of unpaved (gravel) road network against a total network size of 34502.66 km, which is helping connect communities to essential amenities such as schools, clinics, towns, and major economic corridors thereby helping bolster the growth of tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and other sectors.

In this regard Major Transport and Logistics Infrastructure Investments are underway:

- ✓ N3 and N2 Upgrades whilst there are congestions and delays it is envisaged that the end product will enhance the road infrastructure connectivity and the economy.
- ✓ Some of the provincial network being rehabilitated are:
 - P304 KwaMiya to Drakensburg,
 - P3-1 Marburg to Port Shepstone,
 - P 372 Heritage Tourism Roads - Isandlwana Ncome Blood River and Rocks Drift
 - Rehabilitation of P230 Umlalazi,
 - P7-4 Bulwer to Underberg
 - P47/3 and P48 Melmoth
 - P90 rehabilitation in Nkandla has commenced and will continue in 2025/26
 - In 2025/26 we will add 29km of tar road in Nkandla, which is the road from Esiluntshana to Qhudeni.

- ✓ 16 Welisizwe Bailey Bridges completed, for example in Henley Dam in Msunduzi and Mkhambathini as well as in Ugu, Umzinyathi, Umgungundlovu, Uthukela and 16 more will be built in 2025/26.

64. We have heard the communities' outcry on the potholes on our roads. In addressing this matter, we have 88 trucks to patch the potholes and in 2025/26 financial year 33 more trucks will be secured.

65. The engagements with National Department of Transport and PRASA are being undertaken on Freight Rail Revitalization in Durban and Richards Bay railway lines to improve cargo movement efficiency. Our long-term vision is to have a bullet train from Durban to Johannesburg and we are in talks with strategic collaborators.

Madam Speaker,

On Oceans Economy

66. Key to our economic growth is the Oceans Economy. Towards this, the following work has started:

- ✓ The **construction of a 12 ponds fish farm at uTshwayelo, uMhlabuyalingana LM** has been completed and is being operationalised and I have made a call to EDTEA to expand the programme across the province.
- ✓ Maritime Skills Development: **15 maritime graduates have** started a training-in-the-job programme with Sandock Austral Shipyards (Pty) Ltd.

67. Moving forward, our focus will be in the following sectors: Aquaculture development, marine manufacturing, ocean governance and marine protection, coastal and marine tourism, maritime skills and training development and small craft harbour development.

Green Economy and Climate Resilience

68. In order to mitigate the effects of climate change, the Province is implementing a series of interventions, including the following:

We are investing in **green and smart municipality projects, biogas initiatives, solar PV installations, Transformative River Management Program and the Green and Smart Municipalities** to enhance environmental sustainability. These

interventions will create **7,725 job opportunities** and promote the circular economy, reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices.

69. We will continue to implement the Provincial Climate Change Strategy, which aims to coordinate efforts across all sectors—both state and non-state, addressing climate change impacts and mobilizing additional resources for action. This work will be co-ordinated in the Office of the Premier.

70. In an unwavering commitment and collaborative efforts between KwaZulu-Natal Ezemvelo Wildlife and various private landowners, we plan to increase our conservation estate. Ezemvelo has commenced its Commercialisation Strategy. In this regard, eleven (11) commercialisation projects under this strategy have been approved by the National Treasury and are currently being implemented through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism

71. Last year we announced the repurposing of cultural and heritage tourism as an economic drive in KwaZulu-Natal.

- ✓ The iconic King Shaka Statue was successfully unveiled by His Majesty, King Misuzulu KaZwelithini and His Excellency, President Ramaphosa in November 2024.
- ✓ We commemorated 125 years of the battle of Spion Kop in Ladysmith which was attended by international guests as it involved the British Army. As a historical site, it has a potential to promote local cultural heritage tourism.
- ✓ We continue celebrating the victory of Isandlwana conscious of its potential to stimulate local economic development through tourism.
- ✓ Last year there has been progress on engagements regarding the 1860 Indian Labourers Monument project. Respecting community participation, government will be guided by the community on how to move forward with this important and transformative project. This project has been delayed by disagreements within the concerned groups, however we hope to start construction as soon as the disagreement is resolved.

72. We will enhance the tourism sector through **14 tourism development initiatives**, supporting **five major tourism products** and strengthening partnerships. In this regard, we will support the following projects:

- ✓ Thokazi Royal Lodge, Drakensberg Cable Car, KwaXolo Caves, Somkhanda Game Reserve and other Heritage tourism sites.
- ✓ KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board bather protection programme which provides public confidence in the safety of KZN beaches against shark attack.
- ✓ Amafa will enlist Emakhosini Valley at Ulundi on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This is the first step at ensuring that by 2029, Emakhosini will become a World Heritage Site. This will create global attention and will create economic growth in the region.

On Digital Economy

73. Across the world, governments are harnessing the power of data and digital technologies to address modern challenges, and to drive decision-making at strategic, tactical, and operational levels. Our administration recognises that the digital economy is not just an enabler of progress but a fundamental pillar of our future prosperity.

74. Last year, in partnership with the private sector, we introduced the King Dinuzulu Innovation Valley **at Dube TradePort**: an initiative designed to foster creativity, technological advancement, and entrepreneurship in the ICT sector. We are happy to announce the official opening of the King Dinuzulu Innovation Valley which will take place in June 2025. The 1800 young people will benefit from the business process outsourcing jobs that will be created when the Iziko Building is finalised.

75. This Innovation Valley will also serve as a hub to harness skills around digital transformation within the public sector. **To this effect, we are proud to announce that Ms Mbalenhle Zondo working at the Office of the Premier, who will graduate in April 2025 for a Doctorate in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics will be the first official to work at the King Dinuzulu Innovation Valley.**

76. In keeping with our commitment to inclusive economic growth, we have embarked on a bold initiative to establish the **KwaZulu-Natal Digital Fund**: a vehicle aimed at providing young innovators with the financial support necessary to transform ideas into enterprises. **In partnership with the private sector, the fund will also be launched in June 2025.**

77. We have already held high-level discussions with Vodacom South Africa and Telkom to explore strategic partnerships that will accelerate this vision. In the coming weeks, we will define the structural nature of our collaboration with both Vodacom and Telkom, ensuring that our partnership translates into tangible benefits for the people of KwaZulu-Natal. We are laying the foundation for a digital future that is inclusive, innovative, and transformative—one that leaves no KwaZulu-Natal citizen behind.

78. Work is underway to rollout broadband connectivity across KwaZulu-Natal. We are determined to ensure that every citizen, no matter where they reside, can connect, learn, and engage with the world through high-speed internet.

The following projects are being implemented in this regard:

- ✓ In support of the **SA Connect** project, 1132 Wi-Fi hotspots have been implemented within the province.
- ✓ The Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa (USAASA) programme has connected 688 sites in the province.
- ✓ 27 broadband sites have been connected for Traditional Authorities, amounting to 90% of the sites being completed.

79. We will also strengthen our efforts to digitise government services. This will include the implementation of **eProcurement** systems that will streamline our procurement processes, and the rollout of eHealth services, which will provide our citizens with easy access to essential healthcare information and services.

80. Moreover, we are enhancing our **Disaster Management Systems**, ensuring that we can respond more effectively to crises, leveraging technology to protect our communities and save lives.

81. All these initiatives converge in our **Provincial Information and Innovation Hub**, located in the Office of the Premier. This hub is not just a centre for technology; it is a dynamic platform designed for monitoring and intervention. It will help us identify service delivery issues in real-time, allowing us to respond swiftly and effectively.

82. The **Provincial Cybersecurity Framework** for KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has been developed to address growing cyber threats in government IT systems. It emphasizes comprehensive security measures, stakeholder collaboration, and fostering a cybersecurity culture via awareness programs.

On Strategic Industries Development

83. The Province will focus on supporting:

- ✓ the High-Growth Industries which are the services sector (telecommunications, finance, and retail), professional services (medical equipment), and tourism and culture (hotels, transport, and logistics).
- ✓ The Cannabis/Hemp Sector Development which will focus on developing a Shared Cannabis/Hemp Processing Facility in Bergville/Okhahlamba within Uthukela District Municipality. Working with Okhahlamba Local Municipality and CSIR, we will ensure that the facility is operational by the end of 2025/26.
- ✓ The Crafts Sector will be funded to enhance the global competitiveness of local artisans.

On Job Creation through Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)

84. KwaZulu-Natal is actively participating in the Extended Public Works Programme.

Under this programme:

- ✓ Ezemvelo is to create 9,400 employment opportunities through environment sector public employment programmes.
- ✓ The KZN Township and Rural Economies Revitalisation Programme will benefit more than 1,000 community members adjoining Ezemvelo protected areas
- ✓ We will create 7,725 work opportunities in environmental public employment and waste economy programmes with a focus on youth, women, and people with disabilities.

85. In partnership with Fuze Institute, working with the Department of Employment and Labour, we are implementing training and placement programmes for **12 000 young people in mixed farming systems, construction, renewable energy and aviation.**

In Growing the Economy and Ensuring Food Security

86. Agriculture remains a cornerstone of our economy, and we are committed to revitalising this sector through bold interventions. In this regard, we are implementing the following initiatives, amongst others:

✓ **Agricultural Project Funding**

We have implemented an **open call funding mechanism**, allowing smallholder and emerging farmers to access funding of up to **R2 million per individual**. This initiative will accelerate commercialisation and food security, ensuring a more inclusive agricultural economy and create jobs.

✓ **Strategic Partnership with Karan Beef**

We are proud to announce a **strategic partnership with Karan Beef**, Africa's largest beef producer, to benefit historically disadvantaged livestock farmers. This initiative will establish **four beef quarantine facilities**, unlocking the full potential of the beef value chain.

✓ **Support for the Sugar Cane Industry**

Our sugar cane industry faces significant challenges. In order to support this critical sector, we are committing **R30 million** to aid farmers in partnership with the **South African Farmers Development Association (SAFDA) and SA Canegrowers**.

Regarding Ithala Development Finance Corporation

87. As the 7th Administration we have agreed to reposition Ithala Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) to respond to the Province's economic growth agenda. In this regard the IDFC will continue driving economic transformation and empowerment, targeting the creation of at least 2,000 jobs through small business financing and infrastructure development. Ithala has committed R200 million towards funding SMMEs and cooperatives in rural and township economies, reinforcing our pledge to an inclusive economy.

88. We have noted challenges in one of the IDFC subsidiaries, Ithala SOC. The machinery of government is engaging on this matter including consultation national government. We acknowledge the unity of purpose around the issue of Ithala where all parties inside and outside of this legislature, rallied around in support of the existence of Ithala SOC. We want to assure the people of KwaZulu-Natal that Ithala is going nowhere, it is here to stay.

89. Having said that, we acknowledge the proclamation signed by His Excellency, the President for the SIU to investigate alleged irregularities/maleficence. The President's move confirms our resolve that in saving our Ithala SOC, we are not protecting any wrong doers.

Madam Speaker

On PRIORITY 2: REDUCING POVERTY AND TACKLING THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

90. Poverty and the rising cost of living remains as a persistent challenge for many families across KwaZulu-Natal.

91. While social assistance remains a necessary lifeline for many of our people, this trajectory is not sustainable. Our vision for South Africa cannot be one where over 20% of our population relies on welfare for survival. Instead, we must build a nation where economic opportunities replace dependency, where employment and entrepreneurship empower our people, and where prosperity is driven by innovation and productivity.

In Addressing social security and vulnerability

92. Our province will continue to implement a variety of social protection policies and programmes. These include:

- ✓ provision of child support grant, foster care grant, old age grant and disability grant.
- ✓ prevention and management of child abuse,
- ✓ provision of care to children through 37 child and youth care centres (CYCCs).
- ✓ provision of temporary care for children through 52 funded partial care sites,
- ✓ provision of care to over 120 000 children through community-based prevention and early intervention programmes.
- ✓ 24-hour care for older persons through 20 funded old age homes, and community-based care through 59 funded protective workshops

93. **Substance Abuse continue** to wreak havoc to our society. This is a societal issue that cannot be won by government alone but requires all leaders at all levels to fight this scourge. We will continue to coordinate efforts in partnership with Amakhosi, law enforcement agencies, municipalities, Councillors, Religious Leaders and Civil Society to curb the circulating drugs within our communities.

94. The following programmes will be rolled out as part of dealing with this scourge:

- ✓ Substance abuse treatment services will be provided through five treatment centres and 22 out-patient community based NPOs that are funded by government.

On Addressing the plight of child headed households

95. We are committed to addressing the plight of Child headed households and are continuing to provide support to these households. In this regard, Child-headed Households in eThekweni, uMgungundlovu, uThukela, Zululand and uMzinyathi Districts have been mapped and connected to fieldworkers, community structures and service areas and prioritized for service delivery interventions

On Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)

96. Madam Speaker, we are concerned about the gender-based violence and femicide that we continue to witness in our province. From the last quarter of 2024 to date we have visited murder scenes, attended funerals and court cases of young women and children who were victims of this scourge. What has alarmed us is the violent nature of these killings. As government we are standing on the side of women and children and we are committed in eradicating this scourge from our society.

97. As government we value partnerships with state and non-state actors, as a result:

- ✓ We have partnered with Spar Group Ltd with an intention of assisting in the provision of a DNA Laboratory which will fast track the processing of DNA samples by the Province.
- ✓ In partnership with them, we will be launching a GBVF App which will create digital access to GBVF services and emergency assistance and get immediate response from law enforcement agencies and we are inviting other private partnerships on this initiative.

- ✓ The Spar Group will also build a Thuthuzela Care Centre in Jozini, UMkhanyakude District.
- ✓ The new Thuthuzela Care Centre (TCC) in eMadadeni in the Amajuba District which has been built through partnerships has been completed and will be officially opened soon.
- ✓ Working with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, and other stakeholders, we are focusing on strengthening the response and coordination efforts at the local level through the District Development Model (DDM).
- ✓ Psycho-social care and support to victims of GBV and crime, sheltering services through 21 shelters and 31 White Door Centres providing overnight accommodation.
- ✓ Fast-tracking the establishment of the Khuseleka One Stop Centre within eThekweni Cluster.

On Women

98. Madam Speaker, the province has earnestly worked towards removing barriers that obstruct women from upward mobility and access to the markets by providing education and training and creating opportunities to participate in the workforce through various programs.

- ✓ The implementation of the Sanitary Dignity Programme to help improve reproductive healthcare, menstrual health and hygiene management, and educational outcomes for all girls and women, including those with disabilities. **A total number of 936,306 girl learners** have benefitted from the program to date.
- ✓ We have developed an Integrated Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy to drive Government initiatives in providing economic empowerment and opportunities to women

On Youth

99. In July 2024, we **hosted a 2-day KwaZulu-Natal Youth Business Summit, attended by about 1000 delegates** to receive inputs towards developing the Provincial Plan on Economic Empowerment of Youth. The different departments will continue to implement programmes to empower youth including preferential procurement targeting youth.

100. Collectively provincial departments **offered 33,312 learning and earning opportunities** for the youth. These programs include Internships, work-based learning, EPWP, learnerships, apprenticeships, and related developmental programmes.

101. Through the IDFC, we have implemented the Inkunzi Isematholeni programme, (a youth entrepreneurship development programme). This has resulted in 250 youth being enrolled into the programme.

In as far as Youth and Women-Owned Business Support

102. We committed to prioritizing economic transformation by supporting small, youth, and women-owned businesses through partnerships and incubation. We are happy to report as follows:

- ✓ **48 youth and women entrepreneurs** received mentorship, business planning, and access to markets
- ✓ **KZN Youth Empowerment Fund** was advertised last year. Over 3000 applications have been received and are being processed. It is anticipated that by the end of March 2025 disbursements would have occurred
- ✓ **The Women Advancement Fund (WAF):** this private public partnership fund was launched on 30 August 2024 to empower and provide financial and business support to women entrepreneurs. **To date, about 1064 applications have been received and are being processed. Initially the targeted commitment from private sector was R200 million which have since surpassed the R2 billion mark.** The onus is on us as KwaZulu-Natal to ensure that we build a province that is safe to conduct business in. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation of the various businesses is of paramount importance. We are deliberate in not excluding women based on education, socio-economic status, race and geography to ensure that we are building businesses that will be resilient and progressive.

On People with Disabilities

103. Madam Speaker, our constitution asserts every citizen's equality before the law and guarantees freedom from discrimination, including discrimination based on disability.

104. As the provincial government, we have implemented several initiatives to support People with Disabilities and will continue in 2025/26. These include the following:

- ✓ Learnerships directed at People with Disabilities in all District municipalities in partnership with the Department of Transport.
- ✓ The Department of Health providing assistive devices and free health services, including reading glasses and apparatus.
- ✓ The Department of Social Development providing food vouchers and make referrals.
- ✓ Tools and manufacturing skills assistance, together with gardening seeds, which will be provided by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Regarding access to health services

105. The health and well-being of all citizens of this Province is paramount. As we continue providing access to primary health care (PHC), we will ensure that home and community-based services, clinics and community health centres are well resourced and appropriately staffed to provide the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care services.

106. We committed to improve healthcare services, focusing on emergency medical response, disease prevention, and specialist healthcare. We are pleased to report as follows:

- ✓ Access to care, patient safety and availability of medicines have consistently performed well at 88% and 92% respectively.
- ✓ Part of increasing access in line with universal coverage, the **Ikhemisi eliseduze nawe** which is a Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD), a total of **one million and eighty-one thousand nine hundred and thirty-six (1 081 936 clients) have been registered.**
- ✓ **38 new ambulances** were bought in 2024 for the province

107. We are aware of the citizens' concerns about availability of medicine in some of our facilities. Indeed, there have been discrepancies with the availability of medicines due to operational changes that had to be introduced to manage costs in the Department of Health.

108. In our meeting with the Department of Health we agreed that medication should be available for patients in all our facilities. No patient should leave our facilities without medication. In addition to the Departmental Complaints System, the free Premier's Hotline on 080 122 9040 or email on complaints@kznpremier.gov.za can also be used to report any complaints. We commit to providing quality service as this government.

109. As government we will continue to implement various outreach programmes, such as -

- ✓ cancer, hypertension, diabetes and mental health screening.
- ✓ maintaining the community-based outreach teams which are driving prevention at households and in schools for children-Isibhedlela Kubantu
- ✓ increasing the number of Men's health facilities to improve support for men and adherence to treatment.
- ✓ strengthen user friendly services for youth to access contraceptives.
- ✓ scaling up access to facilities with psychosocial support from social workers.
- ✓ Implementing integrated strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy.
- ✓ ensuring that specialist services are accessible to all through improving the quality of healthcare.
- ✓ implementing a single electronic health record

On Education and Skills Development

110. We committed to improve school infrastructure, reducing dropout rates, and ensuring access to quality education for all learners. We are pleased to report as follows:

- ✓ The matric pass rate reached a record-breaking **89.5%** in 2024, with all districts achieving over 80%. **Umkhanyakude District led nationally with a 92.8% rate, followed by Ugu at 91.7% and Umlazi at 89.8%.**
- ✓ Notably, the number of schools achieving a 100% pass rate increased from 246 in 2023 to 321 in 2024.
- ✓ Special schools in the province also excelled, with six out of eleven achieving a 100% pass rate.
- ✓ The school nutrition program now benefits 2.5 million learners across 5,405 schools, supported by 13,756 volunteer food handlers.

- ✓ 66 154 vulnerable learners were provided with Psycho-social Support and Career Development Programmes to curb learner dropout and improve academic achievement.
111. The Department is currently constructing 22 new or replacement schools and several schools are undergoing major upgrades and additions, the **R187m Tongaat Special School** has been completed.
112. In partnership with the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, the Department of Education introduced the **“Siyadlala Thursday”** which encourages schools to dedicate time to sports and art every Thursday. This programme is gaining traction across various parts of the province.
113. The province has also participated in the **ABC Motsepe South African Schools Choral Eisteddfod (SASCE)** in Rhema Bible Church in Randburg Gauteng. The teams sang with great enthusiasm and emerged victorious, **collecting 18 trophies and became the National Champions.**
114. The **Early Childhood Development Programme** is a cornerstone, and we will continue to expand quality education in this phase. This together with a revised curriculum (such as the Three Streams Model and STEM subjects) that focuses on the further education and the world of work, will lead to a better-quality education. **The KwaZulu-Natal Human Resource Development Council** will guide the process and provide periodic reports on what has been done.
115. On education and skills development, the following priorities will be pursued in the 2025/26
- ✓ we will scale up the Implementation of the Occupational and Vocational curriculum for Grade 8 and 9 in four (4) special schools.
 - ✓ we will ensure that more female learners pursue Science, Technology and Maths at school (At least 40%).
 - ✓ 927 Schools that did not offer an African language in the past will be offering a previously marginalized official African Language going forward.
 - ✓ we will provide Mother-tongue-based Home Language workbooks to schools offering the foundation phase in line with the framework of the National Reading Literacy Strategy 2024-2030.

- ✓ we will ensure all 5 827 public schools participate in co-curricular and social cohesion programmes.
- ✓ we will embark on school community engagements in all 12 Districts to combat racism, sexism, hate speech and other forms of intolerance and address inter-generational violence and trauma across society, in partnership with the communities.

Madam Speaker

On Food Security Programme

116. Our government recognises the urgent need to address food insecurity, especially in vulnerable districts such as Zululand, Harry Gwala, uMkhanyakude, and uMzinyathi. In response:

- ✓ Last year we launched the Multi-Planting Season, supporting farmers to cultivate 6,580 hectares of land.
- ✓ 1,000 seed packs were distributed to farmers as part of food security interventions
- ✓ This year we will support over 10,000 households with food production inputs, including seeds, seedlings, and indigenous chicks.

Addressing Housing and Transitional Emergency Accommodation

117. In 2024 we announced that 1,151 families were still living in transitional emergency accommodation following the 2022 floods and committed to expediting their relocation to permanent housing. We have not made significant progress in this area, but we can report as follows:

- ✓ Seven of eleven land parcels have been rezoned with a total yield of 1733 sites.
- ✓ Two land parcels are still being processed for rezoning.
- ✓ Additional funding has been secured for infrastructure development to accommodate more families in permanent housing.

Moving forward, we will work hard to make sure that every family that was displaced because of floods is properly accommodated.

118. In addressing the housing backlog in general, we have provided 5540 Breaking New Ground houses, 406 sites, 261 First Home Finance housing opportunity and 400 houses to vulnerable groups.

119. In 2025/26 financial year we will deliver a total of 6622 houses and distribute 2467 title deeds.

Madam Speaker

On PRIORITY 3: BUILDING A CAPABLE, ETHICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

120. Good governance is the cornerstone of development. For KwaZulu-Natal to thrive, we need a government that is ethical, accountable, and responsive to the needs of its people. This priority calls for strengthening public institutions, enhancing service delivery, professionalizing the public sector, and rooting out corruption at all levels. At the core of this is a government that is run efficiently and effectively, with competent and sufficiently skilled officials who are appointed on merit, delivering qualitative work.

121. We appreciate the ever-available assistance and guidance from both national and provincial offices of the Public Service Commission and other Chapter Nine Institutions.

A Capable State

122. We need civil servants that are capable and fit for purpose. As such, through our Provincial Public Service Training Academy and the National School of Government we have aggressively rolled out catalytic training programmes targeting those areas that respond to the **skills audit** exercise that we have been conducting as the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

123. However, Madam Speaker, we realise that no amount of training will help if we do not **change the culture and professionalise the public service**. This also entails strengthening recruitment processes which are based on experience and skill so that we attract government officials who are ethical and fit for purpose.

124. We need civil servants who understand that when they are serving our people, they are not doing them a favour. We need to go back to the basics and to the ethos of Batho Pele – putting the people first.

125. One of the programmes we will be implementing is the **Service Delivery Charter** that will be in every department. The Charter will set out standards that our people should expect when they receive the service from each government department.

On Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation

Madam Speaker, our people expect improved services and accountability.

126. Last year, we signed the Service Delivery Agreements with every Member of the Executive Council. These **Service Delivery Agreements** contain clear targets which each of the Member of the Executive Council is expected to deliver, including time frames. These Agreements are linked to Performance Agreements of Heads of Departments.

127. In strengthening the above, I had **One-on-One engagement with the MECs**. The sessions were to allow them to report progress on last year's commitments and streamlining 2025/26 plans.

A case for ethical state

128. Madam Speaker, an ethical state is built on accountability, transparency and a commitment to serving the people of the Province of KZN, not self-interest. The province has undertaken a swift stance to mitigate the occurrence of fraud within its fold. All departments are initiating **lifestyle audits** for managers. Furthermore, fraud awareness campaigns are being conducted on all spheres of the provincial government, this initiative is a joint effort between government and various law enforcement agencies.

On Consequence Management

129. The Province of KwaZulu-Natal was one of the first provinces in the country to implement a **Consequence Management Framework**. This framework ensures that there is consequence management for every action and conduct that is inimical with the values of professionalism. The implementation of this framework has seen a number of government officials being made to account for their actions, some having been dismissed from the public service.

Madam Speaker

In Improving Financial Management

130. We have committed ourselves to ensuring sound and prudent financial management in the government of KwaZulu-Natal. In this regard:

- ✓ There has been a **significant improvement in the audit outcomes** in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The focus will now be on those departments not performing well, through the implementation of the **Audit Improvement Plan**.
- ✓ There has been positive progress in the implementation of interventions aimed at eliminating **irregular expenditure**.
- ✓ We will be implementing a **Provincial Financial Recovery Plan** to ensure that we reduce waste and eliminate inefficiencies, including office accommodation.

On Enhancing Service Delivery

131. Community participation is a key element in achieving sustainable democracy. As such, we will continue with engaging our communities whilst also bringing government closer to the people. In this regard, I will be convening a **Provincial District Development Model (DDM) Indaba on 18 March 2025**, to be attended by all spheres of government. The main objective of the Indaba is to ensure effective implementation of DDM in the province.

132. We will continue enhancing delivery of efficient services to our citizens through the implementation of various initiatives, including community engagements like **izimbizo** (public meetings), District Development Model and Operation Sukuma Sakhe Cabinet Outreach Programme.

Madam Speaker

On improving local government and provision of basic services

133. Madam Speaker, as this provincial government we remain poised to support local government within the constrained resources. To this end:

- ✓ we have assisted distressed municipalities to develop and implement financial recovery plans.

- ✓ municipalities with debts to Eskom and Water Boards are assisted to negotiate affordable repayment terms and are monitored to remain within those terms until debts are discharged.
- ✓ municipalities are assisted with the development of revenue raising strategies. A Revenue Optimisation Summit to equip municipalities with revenue enhancement strategies will be organised in March 2025.
- ✓ we are also currently compiling a framework for a Local Government Ombudsman to regulate intra and inter political infighting to stabilise municipalities.
- ✓ Municipalities will be assisted in driving an operation to root out illegal connections through a Masakhane campaign to assist municipalities to implement intensified credit control measures.
- ✓ Regarding water delivery, hot spots which will be receiving dedicated attention are Ethekwini , Uthukela , Umzinyathi , Zululand , Amajuba and Umkhanyakude as the municipalities are highly vulnerable and continuously fail our communities resulting in public protests and discontent from our business community.
- ✓ The implementation of the mega projects for water through UMngeni-uThukela Water directives is already underway which will see the construction of the following dams : Stephen Dlamini under Harry Gwala value R800m for completion in 2030 , Cwabeni Dam under Ugu to the value of R1.8b for completion in 2030 and Mkhomazi water project to the value of R23b for completion in 2032.

134. As a Province we concur with His Excellency President Ramaphosa on the effectiveness of the Presidential Ethekwini Working Group. As a result we are to use a similar approach in supporting uMsunduzi Municipality and our Capital City, As such the KwaZulu-Natal Executive Council recently met with uMsunduzi Municipality Leadership to among other things, discuss comprehensive support.

135. We also met eThekweni Metro Troika to discuss solutions to the Metro water challenges. In this regard I am pleased to announce that a Water Turnaround Strategy Business Plan has been developed and presented to me.

On G20 SUMMIT

136. As part of economic diplomacy, our province will be part of the forthcoming G20 Summit lead by South Africa. While the official programme is yet to be confirmed, as a province we are ready to showcase our districts' competitive economic advantage through a variety of activities in areas aligned with G20 priorities.

137. As a province we believe that G20 can also be a great platform for public diplomacy. Through G20 education campaign, we will empower citizens to actively participate.

Madam Speaker,

138. As I conclude, once again we appreciate the wisdom and leadership from His Majesty the King, Hlanga IwaMakhosi, ume njalo Mnguni Omnyama!

139. To the Hon Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Members of this august House, I appreciate the robustness in which we engage and guided. This House will remain a respected institution of our people.

140. To the Leader of Government Business, Hon MEC Sboniso Duma and the entire Provincial Executive Council colleagues, I am grateful for the spirit of collective leadership that defines our work. Your commitment to open, respectful, and sustainable dialogue ensures that we govern with wisdom, unity, and a shared vision for a better future. It is through this principled engagement that we continue to serve our people with dignity and purpose.

141. To the Leadership of my party, Inkatha Freedom Party who have assigned me to serve the people of KwaZulu-Natal, I am grateful for the opportunity.

142. To my Special Advisor Mr Nhlanhla Mtaka and your family, your contribution to all the work of this government and sacrifices is acknowledged.

143. Whilst on this one, I wish to pay tribute to the **184 thousand** dedicated men and women who serve in the ranks of our government. These are individuals who have devoted their lives to the service of our nation, working tirelessly to uphold the values and aspirations of our people.

144. In honouring them, we also recognise their families—the silent pillars of support who, too, make sacrifices in the name of public service. Their unwavering patience and understanding enable the work of government to continue, often at great personal cost. To them, and to every public servant who carries the weight of our collective responsibility, we extend our deepest gratitude.

145. To the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Commissioner of SAPS, Lt General Mkhwanazi and all the men and women in blue, we acknowledge your commitment.

146. To the Director-General, Dr. Nonhlanhla Mkhize, and her dedicated team in the Office of the Premier, as well as the Heads of Departments, I extend my deepest gratitude for your unwavering commitment to steering the administration of our government with excellence and integrity. Your dedication ensures that the machinery of state remains efficient, responsive, and focused on delivering for our people.

147. To my beloved wife, MaSibisi, my children and my family, I thank you for your unwavering support, patience, and sacrifice. Leadership often demands long hours and difficult choices, and your understanding—especially in the late nights and weekends spent in service of our nation—is a source of strength that I do not take for granted.

Madam Speaker,

148. **Indeed**, each of us stands at a defining moment in history, we are entrusted with a solemn duty—to deliver on the promise of hope and renewal for our people. This is a responsibility we cannot take lightly, nor a commitment we can afford to break. The weight of expectation is great, but so too is our resolve.

149. We dare not fail those who have placed their trust in us. The future calls, and we must answer with action, with integrity, and with unwavering dedication to the service of our nation.

I thank you.