



ANC TODAY

ONLINE VOICE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

STATE OF THE NATION | BY GWEDE MANTASHE

These freedoms are achievable

VIEW



POINT

The State of the Nation address presents us with a sober understanding of the South African situation and the challenges facing us in these trying times.

It provides an assessment of how the ANC has fulfilled the electoral mandate accorded it, based on its 2004 manifesto of creating jobs and fighting poverty, over the past five years; the challenges confronting our country going forward; the practical policy framework and actions the ANC needs to implement to realise the objective of a better life for all, in particular within the context of trying global and local economic constraints and opportunities; and a reaffirmation of the maturing nature of our democracy, the strength of our constitutional institutions and framework and recognition of the depth of leadership in the ANC.

Contrary to initial predictions of the collapse of government following the recall of former President Thabo Mbeki, government operated seamlessly across its various tiers. The recall took place within the country's constitutional framework. Against the backdrop of expected coups d'etat in our continent, that there could be a change in the leadership of the state without bloodshed signified growth in our young democracy. But this is an indication that the ANC has leadership ready to fill in when required, but also with capacity and quality to lead.

We scoff at the purported perception of the constitution and the judiciary being under threat. This we do with conviction because, first, if our movement and state harboured such intentions we would have done so given the majority vote we command in government.

Second, we can testify to parliament and other democratic and constitutional institutions continuing to exercise oversight on all matters pertaining to national interest without hindrance.

Third, we fundamentally believe that robust debate, albeit seemingly extreme at times, about all aspects of our political, judicial, legislative and security life are crucial to democracy - especially one as young as ours - no matter which quarter of society they emerge from.

We also appreciate that all of our life has had to undergo, and continues to undergo, transformation wherein a new culture of human rights and non-racialism are daily infused into formerly racially exclusive institutions. We are, therefore, not naive to delude ourselves to purport that these new tenets of a democratic dispensation are fully in place. Nevertheless, mindful of these contradictions, ours is a genuine democratic system that is alive and healthy.

We are unequivocal in our resolve to ensure that economic growth benefits not a few but all our people. Therefore, the most poor and vulnerable should be uplifted to participate fully in the democratic, political and economic life of our country. To the extent that, in our context, the majority of historically disadvantaged and poor are black is a consequence of colonialism and apartheid.

WEEK IN REVIEW

ANC and IFP call for tolerance | ANC President Jacob Zuma and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) President Mangosuthu Buthelezi met in Durban to discuss issues of common concern, and issue a joint appeal to the people of KwaZulu Natal and South Africa for political tolerance ahead of the upcoming election.

Mandela and Zuma address Idutywa rally | Scores of ANC supporters braved heavy downpours at Idutywa in the Eastern Cape to listen to President Jacob Zuma, and former President Nelson Mandela. Addressing supporters, Madiba said, "May you live forever. Long live the ANC."

ELECTIONS 2009

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It is in this context that the policy frameworks on affirmative action and black economic empowerment, not as racism reversed, should be located. Agostino Neto, in words resonant of the Freedom Charter, said, "what we want is to establish a new society where black and white can live together. Naturally, and so as not to be misinterpreted, I must add that the democratic process must be exercised in such a way that the most exploited masses (who are black) have control of the political power, since they can go further in establishing proper rights for all".

Following from this, how has the ANC government responded to the needs of the people of South Africa, including fulfilling the responsibility of the mandated accorded it in 2004?

The conditions within which the 2004 mandate was bestowed on our movement do not obtain today. Thus our challenges and priorities are adjusted accordingly, and appropriately, yet without deviating from the main objective of poverty eradication and job creation. What conditions pertain today and how do they influence or impact on the direction we are to take?

Fulfilling the 2004 Electoral Mandate

In outlining the ANC's fulfilment to its electoral mandate of 2004 and the challenges presented to the government and the country, it recalls Amilcar Cabral's wisdom "tell no lies and claim no easy victories", by stating both the failures and advances made. The state of the nation recognises that the government has incrementally improved the livelihood of its citizens, provided a social security net for millions of the poor, created jobs and ensured growth of the economy.

Recognition is however made of the fact that despite higher economic growth - around 5% between 2004 and 2008 - job creation efforts, social grants and improved delivery in housing, education and health care, greater challenges persist. The scourge of poverty and joblessness continues to beset our people. Therefore, it is imperative to increase service delivery through building capacity and ensuring greater efficiency in government institutions and personnel. Similarly, resources should be directed at job creation and poverty eradication.

Global economic challenges

Our ability to meet the needs of our people should be viewed within the context of a changed climate in the global economy. The world is faced with an economic meltdown as a result of unfettered capitalism of unregulated financial markets, particularly in the developed economies. The subsequent result has been a negative impact on the economies of developing nations such as that of South Africa.

For example, sectors such as mining, manufacturing and automotive industry have been adversely affected, with the potential the potential of massive job losses, as a result of a fall in the price of commodities and lower demand. Simultaneously, given that there is internal concentration to rescue the economies of developed countries, struggling multi-national companies, foreign direct investment will be limited.

In a global context without readily available global finance, or finance mainly directed towards national economies and the rejuvenation of markets in developed economies, the capacity of our government to access finance to meet our development needs is also affected. These realities coupled with a lower savings culture in the country, joblessness and increased poverty present further difficulties for our government.

While cognisant of these economic difficulties, our government has made appropriate choices in the past. The expanded public works programme, social grants, a prudent fiscal and monetary policy, and a regulated market with a relatively strong banking institution have softened the impact of the global turbulence on South Africa. Our country, therefore, can extend initiatives aimed at poverty eradication and job creation.

We recognise that in confronting this challenge brought on by a depressed global economy, we should also draw from our opportunities. This necessitates that the government look at a combination of strategies, allowing it to meet the developmental objectives while avoiding unnecessary excess in the use of available limited resources.

Our choices in the past years, that is, a prudent macro-economic framework and an expansionary fiscal policy, demonstrate astuteness in our management of our resources and ability to direct them at key priorities areas of development agenda.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

22 February 1968: The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Bill is adopted, making marriages between whites and other races illegal.

24 February 1988: State President PW Botha amends emergency regulations to allow law and order minister Adriaan Vlok to restrict the activities of organisations or people. On the same day 17 anti-apartheid organisations are restricted in terms of the Public Safety Act.

25 February 1991: The president of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) and ANC stalwart, Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, is gunned down in the driveway of his home in Pietermaritzburg. An alleged 'hit-squad' operative claims the murder was planned by the Pietermaritzburg police.

26 February 1996: Apartheid era Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, applies to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for amnesty for his role in the bombing of trade union headquarters in Johannesburg in 1987.

Challenges going forward

The State of the Nation presents a multi-pronged strategy towards meeting our challenges within this difficult economic situation, wherein our economy is projected to grow at 3.5% compared to 5% in the past few years.

This strategy is characterised by a continued investment in the public works programme and infrastructure development. The development of infrastructure assists in stimulating the economy by honing investment through increasing access to otherwise untapped areas of the economy. Through the expanded works programme government is able to increase job opportunities and the potential for skills development.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue to pay attention to the strengthening of our labour market policies to deal with the ills of agencies or labour brokers, outsourcing, contracting, etc.; as these affect vulnerable workers worse in limiting their income earnings and placing them at the verge of job losses when companies are faced with challenges.

It includes increased social spending, in education, housing, clean water and health care services and the extension of the social security net. Improved investment in these areas mitigates the adverse effect of poverty among the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. Cognisant of the historical imbalances these factors seek to uplift the poor and marginalised towards the creation of an equal society. The challenge for our government is to strive towards closing the inequality among our people.

The investment of resources, both machinery and finances, for rural development and agrarian reform. The main purpose is to transform rural livelihoods. These interventions, aimed at assisting small scale farmers, are essential in ensuring productive use of land, increasing food security in rural communities and enabling rural agriculture to add further impetus to the economy.

There is also a stimulus package to assist government to intervene in sectors and industries of the economy under stress, and protect and create further jobs.

The improvement of capacity, personnel and infrastructure, and the entrenchment of a service oriented culture within the public service. These will enable better implementation by those with the responsibility to serve, while simultaneously, enabling citizens to access services at the point entry.

These priorities, as outlined in the state of the nation,

- reflect a path-consistent approach with the previous commitments of our government since 2004. Therefore, they propose a consolidation in the areas where government has done well and encourage further improvement;
- resonate with ANC resolutions in the national policy conference and the Polokwane conference and the NEC's July 2008 Medium Term Policy Priorities, they signify new emphasis in the task of transforming South African society. In the same breath, they indicate and engender synergy in the policy formulation, development and implementation between and among the structures of the organisation;
- form the cornerstone of the 2009 budget, which, itself is informed by the national conferences of the ANC and the NEC's July 28 2008 Medium Term Policy Priorities;
- are our priorities in the coming five years of government and our offer to our people as we request a fresh electoral mandate towards the achievement of a better life for all.

The current economic crisis highlights that in confronting our developmental imperatives we would have to do so with a global view. We are therefore required to engage outside of our borders, sometimes as a way of addressing issues facing South Africa. Above all, such interaction will also go towards cementing our partnerships where they exist and establishing new ones, so as to assist build a better country and a better world.

In this regard, South-to-South relations are important to amplify our voice and actions. This is more so within the context of global trade and negotiations. The aim of such engagement is, first, to ensure that global markets, within developed countries are regulated to prevent an economic crisis similar to the current from happening.

LATEST STATEMENTS

ANC statement on Carl Niehaus, 13 February 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docs/pr/2009/pr0213.html>

Joint statement of ANC President Jacob Zuma and IFP president Mangosuthu Buthelezi, 13 February 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docancdocs/pr/2009/pr0213a.html>

Mandela and Zuma address ANC Idutywa rally, 15 February 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docancdocs/pr/2009/pr0215a.html>

Statement of the ANC National Working Committee, 17 February 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docancdocs/pr/2009/pr0217.html>

ANC statement on Niehaus resignation, 17 January 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docancdocs/pr/2009/pr0217b.html>

ANC reaches across past barriers, 19 February 2009
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?docancdocs/pr/2009/pr0219.html>

Together with other developing nations, we need to ensure that equity and economic justice prevails in the acquisition and utilisation of the world's resources.

Our government should persist in its efforts of engendering world peace and eradication of hunger and disease, through international bodies in the fold of the United Nations.

We will continue to make a significant contribution in Southern Africa to foster greater regional integration for purposes of poverty eradication, peace, democratisation and economic activity. Further work beyond our region, into the continent, will be enhanced as means to facilitate our penetration into other African economies in the East, the West and the North. We will also continue to play a role in the African Union and efforts to create cooperation and good governance at a continental scale.

Compared to other countries faced with this crisis of meltdown, who are borrowing to save global capital, our state is doing so to meet the developmental needs of our people. Our intention to enhance economic growth should be considered within a paradigm of enabling the people to prosper. In the words of Julius Nyerere, "running through our development activities must be this kind of consideration for people".

We remain critical of unfettered capitalism in the global economy, the havoc it wreaks in its wake with consequent devastation for the poor in developing and developed economic countries. Yet at the same we are mindful of our weaknesses as we seek to address the historical and structural legacies of apartheid South Africa. Similarly, we accept criticism levelled at us either by our allies or detractors as we understand it to enhance our ability to better the task at hand. As Amilcar Cabral said "accept criticism wherever it comes from, as a contribution to improving the work. but criticism must be complemented with self criticism proof of our own willingness to help ourselves to improve our thoughts and actions".

To achieve our objective of a better life for all, it requires us as a people and a nation to act collectively. This places an imperative to be inclusive in finding solutions relevant to our context. Necessarily, these are the tenets of our liberation struggle.

Our endeavours, confronted by today's challenges, are aimed at us all gaining freedom in every aspect of our life, dignity and equality. As Agostino Neto said, "a people's struggle for political power, for economic independence, for the restoration of cultural life, to end alienation, for relations with all people on a basis of equality and fraternity - these are the objectives of our struggle".

These freedoms are achievable. A better life for all is possible when we appreciate and internalise the fact that, working together we can do more.

>> Gwede Mantashe is the Secretary General of the ANC.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Door-to-door campaigning and address to public meeting
by ANC Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe
Saturday 21 February 2009
KwaThema Civic Centre, 10h00

NorthWest ANC Manifesto rally | to be addressed by Gwen Mah Nkabinde, Jeff Radebe and Angie Motshekga
Saturday 21 February 2009
Ikageng, Ikageng Township, 10h00

Port Elizabeth ANC Manifesto rally
To be addressed by ANC Chairperson Baleka Mbete
Saturday 21 February 2009, 10h00

ANC WL Meeting with rural women and domestic workers | to be addressed by NEC deployees, PEC, REC
Saturday, 21 February 2009
Ficksburg, Free State, 10h00.

Motorcade and door-to-door campaign | led by ANCWL NEC member Edna Molewa, 11h00.

Gala dinner | to be addressed by Edna Molewa, 18h00.

Door-to-door campaigning
by ANC President Jacob Zuma
Saturday, 21 February 2009
Western Cape's Delf, Leyden Ward 13, 10h00

Door-to-door campaigning
by ANC President Jacob Zuma
Saturday, 21 February 2009
Western Cape, Mfuleni Ward 18 11h00

ANC Rally | to be addressed by ANC President Jacob Zuma
Sunday, 22 February 2009
Khayelitsha Stadium, 12h00

ANC Rally | to be addressed by ANC Treasurer General Mathews Phosa
Sunday, 22 February 2009
Enseleni grounds, Empangeni, 10h00