

GENERAL DEBATE

By Dr Z.L. Mkhize

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Mr Speaker, Mr Premier, Hon Members of his House

It is indeed a privilege for me to participate in this general budget debate. This term of our office is filled with very high expectations from many of our people in this province. Being the first term of the ANC in government, the question is, how different will it be from the previous two terms wherein the IFP was the leading party in government.

Let me therefore reiterate what our premier has already indicated on several previous occasions. This term shall be characterized by peaceful cooperation and coexistence of different parties within an outside government. The ANC has accepted the hand of partnership and support that the parties in government have offered. So far the atmosphere and the general spirit under which cabinet holds its meetings and conducts its business are characterized by mutual respect, collegiality and friendship. The differences in party political policies are acknowledged, and free expression of views is encouraged. We as ANC, led by the Hon Premier are determined to eliminate any form of pettiness, hatred and bitterness from the business of governance. Bitterness and grudges are destructive forces that will once again tear this province apart, and take us far back to the past that we have turned our backs against. Thus, they have no place in our plans, in our agenda and diaries. We will therefore not spend time discussing the failures of the past but we will concentrate in discussing the successful implementation of our future plans to benefit the people in KwaZulu-Natal. There is too much expected from this government to waste our time and energies in unproductive endeavours. We believe animosity and bitterness has cost this province dearly in the past.

We as the ANC are constantly guided by the understanding that it is the task of this government to unite the people of this province around an intense programme of service delivery and propel this province forward to regain the time lost during the past when other provinces surged ahead in their effort to improve the lives of our people.

We have been encouraged by the positive manner in which the people of KwaZulu-Natal have received our government. The Children's Day was a tremendous success. The June 16 rally was a magnificent show of about 10 000 of our youth representing a variety of party formations, gathered in Madadeni sports field, was celebrated in peace. This was probably evidence by the youth that it is not necessary for violence to erupt each time members of different political parties come together. Maybe it is also a tribute to the leadership of different parties, who have so inculcated political tolerance that was well demonstrated on that day. It was also heartening to see thousands of our people gathered in prayer from so many diverse faiths practiced in our permanently dwell in this wonderful province. We congratulate the Premier's office for such magnificent organisation and for leading the efforts to unite people of this province. We congratulate the speaker and the legislature for hosting a multiparty Youth Parliament. Quite frankly I was amazed how the youth conducted themselves in such a mature manner. I believe some of them are already suitable for the seats we occupy. I challenge all the parties to invest in the leadership of their youth for reconciliation to take root.

Reconciliation has to be achieved to ensure that lasting peace prevails in this province. This is a challenge to all leaders. Reconciliation and Peace is needed to heal the scars of many years of hatred and conflict.

To achieve full reconciliation and permanent peace, the ANC invite all parties, to ongoing dialogue. We are ready to talk to all the leaders of the parties represented inside and outside this house to improve the understanding and cooperation. Lively debate and confrontation are two different things. The former we shall promote, the latter we want to avoid.

Hon Aulsebrook has criticized Premier on his response to Dr LPHM Mthsali during the debate of the Province Address. Our point is simple: the IFP should not cast aspersions on the election they did not win; yet the IFP themselves withdrew the case...on their own accord. It is tantamount to saying that the ruling Party won fraudulently, but the IFP shy away from proving their claim in court, which they are entitled to. That is unacceptable. Once the case was withdrawn, the claim has to stop.

Otherwise the ANC is not interested in debating this matter ad infinitum.

We therefore issue a call to all to join us in our march to take KwaZulu-Natal to the heights it has hitherto never scaled.

SIYA PHAMBILI

Forward ever, backward never!

The cordial relationship between the executive and the legislature will be maintained. The offices of the Premier and Speaker as the leaders of the two arms in governance will ensure that the coordination between the two enhance the effectiveness of governance. While the separation of powers is acknowledged as in any democracy in the world, in reality it is coordination that makes the two arms complement and support each other.

There were times in the past when, because of what we considered unnecessary high handedness, some cabinet decisions had to be a matter for legislature to resolve or finalise, quite unnecessarily so, just because of the poor relationship within executive. We also hope that the positive attitudes and relationship within the executive will remain exemplary to encourage a similar spirit to continue to thrive within this house. We envisage a Legislature that will be administered with efficiency in keeping with modern parliamentary democracy encouraging free expression and open debate. As Leader of Government business I have been asked by cabinet to raise with the office of the Speaker the matter of introducing technology that may enhance presentations made by Minister and members in this House. We believe we should constantly explore new ways of ensuring that our legislature is more efficient in serving its members, even if we have to be pioneers in creating systems that have not been seen in conventional parliamentary systems, as long as they will improve our performance.

The vacancies in the senior posts of the legislature need to be filled as soon as possible to provide this house with sound and confident administrative leadership. Strong leadership will be required to avoid this house sliding into the ridiculous levels of inefficient that we have witnessed in the past.

The multiplicity of parties and the wide range of political opinions represented in this legislature will allow robust debate and make our legislature the envy of many provinces. We trust that the debate will continue to be conducted in a manner that will strengthen the respect our people have of this hard earned democracy, and never again be a source of violence

outside the four walls of this house. Peace is the foundation upon which we want to build this government.

We invite all the party leaders to commit themselves similarly to the absolute primacy and necessity of peace as the basis of our programme of reconstruction and development of our province. Our people have voted for peace and development. They voted against violence and political intolerance. They voted for progress.

The Premier has indicated the commitment of the ANC to resolve the outstanding questions in this House, such as the Provincial Constitution, the adoption of the coat of arms, and the finalisation of the matter of parliamentary Counsellors to His Majesty. He reiterated this commitment last week, in the commemoration service at KwaCeza on the 20th June in the presence of Isilo, the Deputy President and the President of Inkatha Freedom Party.

We trust that the conclusion of these issues will close a chapter of our acrimonious past for good. We have reiterated as the ANC that the Constitutional Court would certainly have struck down the provincial constitution we adopted even without the challenge by the ANC. We voted for it when it became apparent that we could not convince some of the parties of the absurdity of some of the provisions that they insisted on. About seven years later it seems even with the advantage of hindsight there are some leaders who have not realized why the constitution was 'fatally flawed'. Fortunately, the ANC will make sure that the repeat performances shall not be permitted.

We as the ANC are guided by the desire to create a better life for all people. This desire is encapsulated in the words of our President Thabo Mbeki, when he said: "A people's contract to create work and fight poverty "However, even as we continue to score new victories in the struggle to build a humane society, we must constantly remind ourselves of our past of many centuries of colonialism and racism.

At the top of the provincial priorities is the challenge of fighting poverty. According to the "KwaZulu-Natal Province profile analysis": the percentage of the households in this province who receive incomes below the poverty line have moved from 45,3% in 1996, to 53% in 2002. This translates to 5,084 162 poor people in the province. Poverty is highest among Black people, particularly rural communities where 74% live below the poverty line. This province required R4, 2 billion to move 3,9 million people out of poverty, but by year 2002, this figure had increased to R7,9 billion. It is well known that the levels of poverty vary according to the different geographic districts of the province, the worst hit being Umkhanyakude, Zululand, Sisonke, and Umzinyathi. This fact must never blind us to the reality of peri-urban squalor even a city considered in this document. The level of unemployment rate is recorded as worst amongst Africans at 55% in year 2002, whilst it has risen in the different communities as well.

This therefore makes poverty the overriding priority that the government has to focus on. As seen from the statement of the President above, the ANC has placed the matter of job creation at the top of its priorities. In the speeches delivered in this House, both the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Economic development indicated the steps to be taken to stimulate economic growth and attract investment in this province. During this term, we will work hard to see the key strategic projects such as the King Shaka airport and Dube trade port come into fruition within reasonable time. On 21 May, during the State of the Nation Address, the President specifically singled out the this project, saying:

“National Treasury is in the final stages of registering the King Shaka International Airport and the freight terminal as a Public-Private Partnership. Construction will start after the agreement has been reached with the Airports Company...”

The proposed KwaZulu-Natal Platform for Growth will certainly assist in creating the partnership that the development of the magnitude envisaged above, will require.

A recent report from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Traditional Affairs indicated that there is a large number of municipalities which have financial difficulties and have to be assisted and departmental interventions needed to restore them to acceptable financial and administrative capacity. This is a cause for serious concern as these are the vital spheres of service delivery. Our province will not succeed unless the municipalities succeed.

The programme to develop the decaying small towns will assist to stem unplanned urban migration and in job creation. Research done by the HSRC showed that the highest incidence of HIV was in the informal settlements. Our efforts must be focused on reducing the mushrooming of these settlements.

Plans to implement the Expanded Public Works Programme were satisfactorily outlined by the Minister when he introduced the budget debate. We need our people to prepare themselves to access these opportunities when they present themselves. The principle of growth fund is in itself a sound one; we are however aware of this discomfort that government has been placed in, to start this fund within a budget that had all recourse distributed to different competing priorities.

Obviously, this approach will not continue in the next financial year because the planning process will have been started early.

The ANC supports the efforts to coordinate the poverty alleviation funds offered by the government departments, to ensure that they are properly administered and monitored to achieve food security and sustainability in the communities rather than the sense of dependency they seem to frequently cause. There is also a need to transform the procurement procedures to encourage the entrepreneurs and cooperatives to be part of the partnership in the fight against poverty in a sustainable manner.

We are also very encouraged by the programmes of skills development, learnerships and human resource development programmes that have been enunciated by my colleagues. Similarly we want to support the efforts of the Minister and the department of agriculture in strengthening the scale farmers as a major contribution to food security. Nationally the social grants were increased from R10 billion in 1994 to R34 billion in 2003, with beneficiaries rising from 2,6 million to 6,8 million from 1994 to 2003 respectively. This trend has increased the allocation to the Social Welfare Department and made it the second largest budget in the province. It is clear that the approach outlined both by the Premier and the Minister for Finance and Economic reflects the cabinet’s long-term view that more emphasis should be placed to self-reliance to avoid an unsustainable dependency on social grants. It is a multifaceted approach to fighting poverty.

The above approach will provide a solid foundation for an intense campaign to fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Together with all the programmes of social mobilization promoting safer sex and encouraging prevention, the availability of treatment for

opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, diarrhoea, chest infections and sexually transmitted diseases etc. we will make an impact on the epidemic and see some changes in the next five years.

President Mbeki challenged the Department of health to extend the programme of Anti-Retroviral drugs to 113 facilities by next year, involving 53 000 people. Kwazulu-Natal is ready to make the necessary contribution in this regard. The problems associated with starting this programme must be underestimated. There are many complications we shall contend with the results will take a while to show. But, built on the foundation of poverty eradication and a caring society where compassion and recognition of human right for every individual rather than stigmatisation, we have a chance to defeat this scourge.

Let us join hands and charge forward.

SIYA PHAMBILI!!!!

Forward Ever!!!
Backward Never!!!

Aluta Continua!!!!