

Address by President Jacob Zuma, to the New Age Business Breakfast

16 March 2012

Honourable Premier, Noxolo Kiviet;

Honourable Ministers;

The Eastern Cape business community;

Fellow South Africans,

Good morning to you all;

We are gathered this morning in this beautiful province of the Eastern Cape.

We appreciate the opportunity to share ideas with the business community on what we can do to achieve a better life in this province and around the country.

In the State of the Nation Address, we said we needed to work together to tackle the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

The vision of our government is the creation of a united, non-racial non-sexist, free, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

The first 17 years of freedom, and indeed the first 100 years of the foremost liberation movement in the continent, the ANC, have focused on achieving political rights. That is because we knew that once we achieved our related political freedom, we would have the power and the authority to achieve the rest.

We have achieved a free South Africa. Each day we do our best to achieve a truly non-racial and non-sexist society. We work daily to enhance and strengthen democracy, which we have consolidated in only a few years.

With political freedom having been consolidated in the first 20 years, we must dedicate the next 20 years to economic development and transformation.

The State of the Nation Address took us to that new trajectory. We placed before the nation an infrastructure programme which will take us many steps forward towards social and economic development.

It will contribute immensely to help us achieve the & quot;prosperous`` South Africa that we refer to.

We have studied countries that have invested in infrastructure in this manner, and they have been successful. It is an infrastructure revolution that will unlock the natural resources of our country to build our economy.

We want to see the whole country turning into a huge construction site. We want to see dams being built in rural areas to extend water access.

We want to see the refurbishment of schools and hospitals, the building of roads and dams, the improvement of ports and railway lines and various projects that will improve the lives of our people and boost economic development and jobs.

We want to change the landscape of the country completely.

And every part of the country will be touched.

During the State of the Nation Address, I made an announcement of a range of infrastructure initiatives aimed at encouraging investment here in Eastern Cape and boost the economy.

These included a pledge to build a dam using the Umzimvubu River as the source, in order to expand agricultural production.

Feasibility studies for this project have already begun.

Other water infrastructure development projects include seawater desalination in Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred, and the rehabilitation of former homeland irrigation schemes, and a dam in the upper Orange River.

Compatriots,

Allow me to use this opportunity to also touch on some topical issues which have made news in the media.

One such issue is that of electronic tolling systems in Gauteng.

This matter began in 2005, when the South African National Roads Agency submitted its Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project proposal to government.

After consultations and a lot of work, the proposal was accepted by Cabinet in mid-2007.

The related road sections were declared toll roads in March 2008.

The procurement and contracting processes commenced and the construction of new roads in Gauteng began in July 2008.

The rationale behind the freeways improvement project is that Gauteng, which generates nearly 38 % of the total value of South Africa`s economic activities, has developed beyond its infrastructural capabilities.

Roads in general are unable to keep up with increasing traffic demands. This has affected road users and the economy by the daunting peak-hour traffic periods each morning and evening.

The Gauteng economy cannot afford any impediment to the traffic flow, since such an impediment will stifle economic growth that leads to job creation.

The open tolling system will assist government to obtain revenue that will be utilised in order to improve the road infrastructure, service debt already incurred for the upgraded freeway network in Gauteng and ensure a well-maintained and upgraded road network into the future.

We know that our people are affected by serious poverty and unemployment, and the e-tolls are an additional financial and administrative burden.

But we plead for your understanding because at the end of the day, we have to develop and strengthen the road infrastructure of Gauteng.

Another issue that has been in the news lately is that of labour brokers.

We reiterate that our government is determined to implement all our laws aimed at protecting workers from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Discussions had been taking place on the Labour Relations Amendment Act, which includes dealing with the problems arising from some labour broking practices.

The ruling party's 2009 Manifesto, was jointly adopted and launched by the Alliance - the ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party.

The Manifesto says the ANC government will; "In order to avoid exploitation of workers and ensure decent work for all workers as well as to protect the employment relationship, introduce laws to regulate contract work, subcontracting and out-sourcing, address the problem of labour broking and prohibit certain abusive practices & quot;.

As stated in the State of the Nation Address and by Cabinet last week, we will continue engaging the social partners at NEDLAC so that we can conclude this matter responsibly in the manner outlined in the ruling party's manifesto.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us make a pledge that together we will for the next 20 years have a single-minded focus on economic development.

Let us focus exclusively on how we can build a better life for all our people.

This economic drive will involve enhanced skills development.

I will on the 4th of April meet the leadership of all 50 Further Education and Training Colleges, to discuss the role of these institutions in providing the skills we need to make our economic revolution a success.

We want to see education and skills development thriving everywhere in our country. That is why we work with the provincial government here to normalise and improve education in the Eastern Cape.

We are happy with the progress made so far, and we will continue to support the Eastern Cape to ensure that education is returned to its former healthy state.

Working together as teachers, school governing bodies and unions, we will be able to reverse the 2% decline recorded in the matric pass rate for 2011.

Compatriots,

Allow me therefore to invite you directly here in the Eastern Cape, to join us in the economic development and infrastructure revolution.

We will achieve a fully free, democratic, non-sexist, non-racial and prosperous South Africa.

I thank you.