

State of the Nation Address by His Excellency Jacob G Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa on the occasion of the Joint Sitting Of Parliament, Cape Town

14 February 2013

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces;
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and Deputy Chairperson of the NCOP;
Deputy President of the Republic, Honourable Kgalema Motlanthe;
Former President Thabo Mbeki and Mrs Mbeki,
Former President De Clerk and Mrs De Clerk,
Former Deputy Presidents Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Baleka Mbete,
Honourable Chief Justice of the Republic, and all esteemed members of the Judiciary;
Honourable Peeroo, Chairperson of the SADC Parliamentary Forum,
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Distinguished Premiers and Speakers of our Provinces;
Chairperson of SALGA, and all local government leadership;
Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders;
The Heads of Chapter 9 Institutions;
The Governor of the Reserve Bank; Ms Gill Marcus,
The Deputy Chairperson of the National Planning Commission and Deputy President of the ANC,
Mr Cyril Ramaphosa and all ANC Officials,
Leaders from business, sports, traditional, religious and all sectors,
Members of the diplomatic corps, Special and distinguished guests,
Honourable members,
Fellow South Africans,

Good evening to you all, sanibonani nonke, molweni, dumelang.

Let me thank the Presiding Officers for affording me this opportunity to share our 2013 programme of action with the joint sitting of Parliament.

We greet all who are watching this broadcast from their homes and at GCIS viewing centres around the country, including those in Khayelitsha, Nyanga and Gugulethu here in Cape Town.

Let me also extend my gratitude to all who contributed to the preparation of this address. I received several messages via email, twitter and Facebook.

I also spent some time with Grade 12 learners who shared their own views on what should be contained in the speech. I found the inputs very informative and enriching.

Honourable Members,
Compatriots and friends,

On the 15th of August last year, the National Planning Commission handed over the National Development Plan, the vision of the country for the next 20 years, to the President in this august house.

The NDP contains proposals for tackling the problems of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

It is a roadmap to a South Africa where all will have water, electricity, sanitation, jobs, housing, public transport, adequate nutrition, education, social protection, quality healthcare, recreation and a clean environment.

The achievement of these goals has proven to be difficult in the recent past, due to the global economic recession.

The crisis in the Eurozone affects our economy as the Eurozone is our major trading partner, accounting for around 21 per cent of our exports.

Our GDP growth is expected to average at 2.5% cent, down from 3.1% in the previous year. We need growth rates in excess of five per cent to create more jobs.

The National Development Plan outlines interventions that can put the economy on a better footing. The target for job creation is set at 11 million by 2030 and the economy needs to grow threefold to create the desired jobs.

In my last meeting with the business community, the sector indicated that for the economy to grow three-fold, we must remove certain obstacles.

We will engage business, labour and other social partners in pursuit of solutions. No single force acting individually can achieve the objectives we have set for ourselves.

Honourable Members,

I would now like to report on progress made since the last State of the Nation Address and also to discuss our programme of action for 2013.

I will look at the five priorities – education, health, the fight against crime, creating decent work as well as rural development and land reform.

Last year, I addressed the nation on government's infrastructure plans.

By the end of March this year, starting from 2009, government will have spent about 860 billion rand on infrastructure. Various projects are being implemented around the country. I will discuss just a few.

The construction of the first phase of the Mokolo and Crocodile River Water Augmentation has commenced and it will provide part of the water required for the Matimba and the Medupi power stations.

The construction of the bulk water distribution system for the De Hoop Dam began in October 2012, to supply water to the Greater Sekhukhune, Waterberg and Capricorn district municipalities.

We have to shift the transportation of coal from road to rail in Mpumalanga, in order to protect the provincial roads. Thus the construction of the Majuba Rail coal line will begin soon.

We have also committed to improve the movement of goods and economic integration through a Durban-Free State-Gauteng logistics and industrial corridor.

In this regard, substantial work is now underway to develop the City Deep inland terminal in Gauteng.

Initial work has commenced in the expansion of the Pier 2 in the Durban Port.

And thirdly, land has been purchased for the development of a new dug-out port at the Old Durban airport.

In the Eastern Cape, I officially opened the port of Ngqura and construction is now underway to develop a major new transhipment hub.

The Umzimvubu Dam is critical for rural livelihoods. Preparatory work has commenced for the construction to begin next year.

The upgrading of Mthatha airport runway and terminal and the construction of the Nkosi Dalibhunga Mandela Legacy Road and Bridge are currently underway.

I have asked for work in the North West to be fast-tracked further in light of the huge backlogs in that province, especially electricity, schools, clinics, roads and water in the next two years.

To improve the transportation of iron-ore and open up the west coast of the country, we have expanded the rail capacity through the delivery of 11 locomotives.

The first phase of the expansion – to increase iron ore port capacity at Saldanha to 60 million tons per annum – was officially completed in September last year.

Construction work is taking place in five cities – Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Bay, Rustenburg, eThekweni, Tshwane to integrate the different modes of transport – bus, taxi and train.

In the energy sector, we have now laid 675 kilometres of electricity transmission lines to connect fast-growing economic centres and also to bring power to rural areas.

In addition, government signed contracts to the value of R47 billion in the renewable energy programme.

This involves 28 projects in wind, solar and small hydro technologies, to be developed in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape and in the Free State.

We established an 800 million rand national green fund last year. To date, over 400 million rand investments in green economy projects has already been approved for municipalities, other organs of state, community organisations and the private sector across all provinces.

We have also rolled out 315 000 solar water geysers as of January this year, most of which were given to poor households, many of whom had never had running hot water before.

We have scored successes in extending basic services through the infrastructure programme. Close to 200 000 households have been connected to the national electricity grid in 2012.

You will also recall that Census 2011 outlined the successes in extending basic services. The report said the number of households with access to electricity is now at 12.1 million, which translates to 85%. Nine out of 10 households have access to water.

To prepare for the advanced economy we need to develop, we will expand the broadband network.

Last year, the private and public sector laid about 7000 kms of new fibre optic cables. The plan is to achieve 100% broadband internet penetration by 2020.

With regard to social infrastructure, a total of 98 new schools will have been built by the end of March, of which more than 40 are in the Eastern Cape that are replacing mud schools.

Construction is expected to begin in September at the sites of two new universities in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga.

Last week, we published an Infrastructure Development Bill for public comment.

We are cracking down on corruption, tender fraud and price fixing in the infrastructure programme.

The state has collected a substantial dossier of information on improper conduct by large construction companies.

This is now the subject of formal processes of the competition commission and other law enforcement authorities.

The infrastructure development programme has been a valuable source of learning for government. In the year ahead, we will fast-track many of the projects that the PICC has announced.

The lessons are that we must coordinate, integrate and focus on implementation.

Honourable Members,

The past two years have demonstrated that where the state intervenes strongly and consistently, it can turn around key industries that face external or internal threats as has happened in our manufacturing sector.

We have seen the revitalization of train and bus production in South Africa, largely because of the drive for local procurement.

PRASA and Transnet have committed hundreds of billions of rands to improving our commuter and freight train network.

The clothing, textiles and footwear industry has stabilised after 15 years of steadily falling employment. A clothing support scheme provides broad financial support, saving a number of factories and jobs.

On broader economic transformation, revised Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act and codes are being finalised. The development of black owned enterprises and black industrialists will be prioritised.

Government has several programmes of supporting small business. A key project for the Presidency currently is to get government departments to pay SMMEs within 30 days.

Departments are required to submit monthly reports so that we can monitor progress in this regard.

We have taken a decision that accounting officers who fail to execute this directive, should face consequences.

In the 2010 State of the Nation Address, I announced the Job fund, and three billion rand has been approved for projects that will create jobs.

Honourable Members,

Just over a third of the population is under the age of 15. Our country, like many others, has a crisis of youth unemployment.

Last May I asked constituencies at NEDLAC to discuss youth employment incentives. I am pleased that discussions have been concluded and that agreement has been reached on key principles. The parties will sign the Accord later this month.

The incentives will add to what Government is already doing to empower the youth.

State owned companies provide apprenticeships and learnerships and we urge that these be increased. We appeal to the private sector to absorb 11 000 FET graduates who are awaiting placements.

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform runs the National Rural Youth Services Corps, which has enrolled 11 740 young people in various training programmes.

The Department is also planning nine Rural Youth Hubs per province, including in the 23 poorest districts in the country.

We will also use the Expanded Public Works Programme and the Community Work programme to absorb young people.

Working together we will find a solution to youth unemployment.

Honourable members,

We identified tourism as one of our job drivers.

Tourist arrivals grew at an impressive 10.7 percent between January and September 2012, which is higher than the global average of 4% for last year.

Ironically, the very success of South Africa's national conservation effort resulting in over 73% of the world's rhino population being conserved here, has resulted in our country being targeted by international poaching syndicates.

We are working with recipient and transit countries such as Vietnam, Thailand and China and are intensifying our efforts to combat this increasing scourge.

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Chairperson,

Mining, which is historically the backbone of the economy, has faced difficulties in recent months.

Last year the sector was hit by wild cat strikes and the tragedy in Marikana where more than 44 people were killed.

We established an Inter-Ministerial Committee made up of senior cabinet Ministers to assist families during that difficult period. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry led by Judge Ian Farlam continues its work.

Through working together we were able to restore social stability in the area.

Government, labour in the form of COSATU, NACTU and FEDUSA, Business Unity SA, Black Business Council and the community sector met in October and reached an agreement which laid the basis for a return to work across the mining industry.

In particular, we agreed to work together to strengthen collective bargaining; to address the housing problems in the mining towns; to support the National infrastructure Programme; to address youth unemployment; and to identify measures to reduce inequalities.

Work is underway and the team will report in due course with specific plans for Rustenburg, Lephalale, Emalahleni, West Rand, Welkom, Klerksdorp, Burgersfort/Steelport, Carletonville and Madibeng.

Two weeks ago, I had a meeting in Pretoria with Sir John Parker, the chairman of Anglo-American Plc to discuss the reported plans to restructure and retrench 14 000 workers at Anglo-American Platinum.

Compatriots,

Honourable Members,

We believe that at a policy level we have managed to bring about certainty in the mining sector. The nationalisation debate was laid to rest in December at the ruling party's national conference.

Ensuring that the public services we provide our people today can continue to be provided to our people tomorrow, requires that we have suitable tax policies to generate sufficient revenue to pay for these services.

From time to time, we have commissioned studies into our tax policies, to evaluate the extent to which they meet the requirements of the fiscus.

Later this year, the Minister of Finance will be commissioning a study of our current tax policies, to make sure that we have an appropriate revenue base to support public spending.

Part of this study, will evaluate the current mining royalties regime, with regard to its ability to suitably serve our people.

Honourable Members,
Distinguished guests,

In last year's address we raised the issue of the gap market, the people who earn too much to qualify for an RDP house and too little for a bank mortgage bond.

From April 2012 to December 2012, Provincial Departments committed a budget of 126 million rand of the Human Settlements Development Grant for this programme, known as the Finance Linked Individual Subsidy programme.

The money is being used through the National Housing Finance Corporation, which has been appointed to deliver houses to people within the Gap market in twelve registered projects.

A total of 70 million rand of this amount has been used to date.

Projects include Walmer Link in the Eastern Cape, Lady Selbourne, Nelmapius, Bohlabela Borwa, Cosmo City and Fleurhof in Gauteng, Intabazwe Corridor Housing in the Free State and Seraleng in North West.

The implementation of these eight GAP housing projects is currently underway.

Compatriots and friends,

Honourable Members,

On education, we are pleased that the Grade 12 pass rate is finally on an upward trend. We congratulate the Class of 2012, their teachers, parents and communities for the continued improvement.

We congratulate the top province for 2012, Gauteng and top grade 12 learner, Miss Madikgetho Komane, from Sekhukhune district, Limpopo, who is our special guest.

Honourable members,

The Annual National Assessments in our schools, have become a powerful tool of assessing the health of our education system.

We welcome the improvement each year in the ANA results, but more must be done to improve maths, science and technology.

The Department of Basic Education will establish a national task team to strengthen the implementation of the Mathematics, Science and Technology Strategy.

We urge the private sector to partner government through establishing, adopting or sponsoring maths and science academies or Saturday schools.

Compatriots,

We are pleased with the growth of our early childhood education programmes, including Grade R.

We are also pleased with our adult education programme, Khari Gude, which has reached more than 2,2 million people between 2008 and 2011.

We also continue to encourage people from all walks never to stop learning. Many were inspired when accomplished musician and my special guest, Mr Sipho Hotstix Mabuse obtained his matric last year, at the age of 60.

Honourable Members,

We declared education as an apex priority in 2009. We want to see everyone in the country realising that education is an essential service for our nation.

By saying education is an essential service we are not taking away the Constitutional rights of teachers as workers such as the right to strike.

It means we want the education sector and society as a whole to take education more seriously than is happening currently.

All successful societies have one thing in common – they invested in education. Decent salaries and conditions of service will play an important role in attracting, motivating and retaining skilled teachers.

In this regard, we will establish a Presidential Remuneration Commission which will investigate the appropriateness of the remuneration and conditions of service provided by the State to all its employees.

I have directed that the first priority should be teachers.

The Commission will also assess the return on investment.

In elevating education to its rightful place, we want to see an improvement in the quality of learning and teaching and the management of schools. We want to see an improvement in attitudes, posture and outcomes.

Working with educators, parents, the community and various stakeholders, we will be able to turn our schools into centres of excellence.

Honourable Members,

Five years ago, South Africa had such a low life expectancy that experts suggested that by 2015, our life expectancy would have been exactly where it was in 1955.

It was with good reason that we were delighted when late last year, studies from the Medical Research Council, the Lancet medical journal and others began reporting a dramatic increase in life expectancy from an average baseline of 56 years in 2009 to 60 years in 2011. These reports also noted significant decreases in infant and under five mortality.

Increased life expectancy is a key to the country's development. People are returning to work, they are being productive, economically and socially. The family structure is increasingly stable and parents live longer and are able to take care of their children.

We should not become complacent, in light of these achievements.

Given the high co-infection rate between HIV and TB, we have integrated these services.

Work is also continuing on the research side. South Africa has discovered a candidate drug to treat Malaria.

In addition, researchers at the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa consortium, also discovered broad neutralising antibodies against HIV.

Deputy President Motlanthe has appointed new members of the South African National Aids Council Trust. We congratulate the team, which is led by retired Judge Zac Yacoob, as chairperson.

Diseases of lifestyle are on an alarming increase. We have to combat and lower the levels of smoking, harmful effects of alcohol, poor diets and obesity.

Honourable members,

In 2014 we will create the National Health Insurance Fund. The Department of Health will accelerate and intensify progress in the pilot districts.

In that regard, as from April this year, the first group of approximately 600 private medical practitioners will be contracted to provide medical services at 533 clinics within villages and townships in 10 of the pilot districts.

Compatriots and friends,

In June we will mark the centenary of the 1913 Land Act which turned black people into wanderers, labourers and pariahs in their own land.

Former ANC President Sefako Makgatho outlined as such in his 1919 ANC conference presidential address.

He said;

"The Native Land Act still operates as mercilessly in different parts of the Union, and as a result many native families are still working for white farmers only for their food".

We are also honoured, in this year of the anniversary of the 1913 Land Act, to have present among us, Mrs Nomhlangano Beauty Mkhize, one of the veterans who together with her husband, Saul Mkhize, led the struggle against forced removals in Driefontein and Daggaskraal, in the present Mpumalanga Province.

The land question is a highly emotive matter.

We need to resolve it amicably within the framework of the Constitution and the law.

I received a message on Facebook from Thulani Zondi who raised his concern about the slow pace of land redistribution. He said: "Mr President, as we are commemorating 100 years since the Land act of 1913 was introduced to dispossess the African majority.

I urge you to accelerate redistribution of the land to the landless African people.

"When we do the redistribution we need to be mindful of food security. Training and mentorship of emerging black commercial farmers must take place".

From 1994, we have been addressing the land reform problem through restitution, redistribution and tenure reform.

As stated before, we will not be able to meet our redistribution targets.

Government's mid-term review last year revealed a number of shortcomings in our land reform implementation programme. We will use those lessons to improve implementation.

Firstly, we must shorten the time it takes to finalise a claim. In this regard, Government will now pursue the 'just and equitable' principle for compensation, as set out in the Constitution instead of the "willing buyer, willing seller" principle, which forces the state to pay more for land than the actual value.

Secondly there are proposed amendments to the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 in order to provide for the re-opening of the lodgement of restitution claims, by people who missed the deadline of 31 December 1998.

Also to be explored, are exceptions to the June 1913 cut-off date to accommodate claims by the descendants of the Khoi and San as well as heritage sites and historical landmarks.

Another key lesson is to provide adequate post-settlement support to new landowners so that land continues to be productive.

We also need to provide better incentives for commercial farmers that are willing and capable of mentoring smallholder farmers.

Another challenge we have faced is the preference for money instead of land by some claimants, which also does not help us to change land ownership patterns.

As part of the Presidency stakeholder engagement programme ahead of the State of the Nation Address, Deputy President Motlanthe held a meeting with both farmers and farm workers in Paarl on Tuesday.

Stakeholders agreed that there should be peace and stability in the agriculture sector and that the living and working conditions of farm workers should be improved urgently.

It is also encouraging that even the farmers called for the fast tracking of land reform and support to emerging farmers.

We will continue the engagement with both farmers and farm workers.

Compatriots and friends,

We should also remain mindful of rapid urbanisation that is taking place. The Census Statistics reveal that 63% of the population are living in urban areas. This is likely to increase to over 70% by 2030.

Apartheid spatial patterns still persist in our towns and cities. Municipalities alone cannot deal with the challenges. We need a national approach.

While rural development remains a priority of government, it is crucial that we also develop a national integrated urban development framework to assist municipalities to effectively manage rapid urbanisation.

As part of implementing the National Development Plan, all three spheres of government need to manage the new wave of urbanisation in ways that also contribute to rural development.

Honourable Members,

Improving the status of women remains a critical priority for this government.

The Bill on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment has been approved by Cabinet for public comment. The Bill criminalizes practices that have adverse effects on women and girls.

It also legislates the 50/50 policy position with regard to the representation of women in decision making structures.

Honourable members,

The brutal gang rape and murder of Anene Booysen and other women and girls in recent times has brought into sharp focus the need for unity in action to eradicate this scourge.

The brutality and cruelty meted out to defenceless women is unacceptable and has no place in our country. Last year the National Council on Gender Based Violence was established.

It comprises government, non-governmental Organizations, Community-Based Organizations, Faith-Based organizations, academia, research institutions, government, men's groupings, and representation from women, children and persons with disabilities.

We urge this coordinating structure to make the campaign of fighting violence against women an everyday campaign.

We applaud all sectors for the campaigns that have taken place already, highlighting that such acts will not be tolerated.

I have directed law enforcement agencies to treat these cases with the utmost urgency and importance. The Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units, which were re-established in 2010, have increased personnel.

During the last financial year, the Units secured over 363 life sentences, with a conviction rate of 73% for crimes against women above 18 years old and 70% for crimes against children under 18 years of age.

Masibhunkule sisebenze sonke, silwe nalenkinga esibhekene nayo yabantu abadlwengula omame nezingane, ngisho nezalukazi imbala. Ihlazo nobunswelaboya obesabekayo lokhu abakwenzayo. Izigilamkhuba kufanele zibikwe emaphoyiseni ziboshwe.

Government is adding other mechanisms to protect women, such as the Protection from Harassment Bill. While the Domestic Violence Act also provides protection, it only applies to persons who are in a domestic relationship.

The Protection from Harassment Bill also deals with harassment by persons who stalk their victims by means of electronic communications.

In addition, the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill was passed by the National Assembly last year and is now at the National Council of Provinces.

Once implemented, the law will assist women and children, who are often victims of this heinous crime.

Compatriots and friends,

There is increased visibility of the police which contributes to the reduction in the levels of serious crime.

The operations focusing on illegal firearms, stolen and robbed vehicles, liquor and drugs which are regarded as main generators of crime have assisted in crime reduction.

Compatriots and friends,

Government continues to wage a war against corruption.

The capacity of the Special Investigating Unit has grown from an initial 70 staff members to more than 600 at present.

I have since 2009, signed 34 proclamations directing the SIU to investigate allegations of corruption, fraud or maladministration in various government departments and state entities.

Criminal Investigations were initiated against 203 accused persons in 67 priority cases under investigation by the end September 2012.

In total, pre-trial proceedings have been initiated against 191 persons. A total of 66 persons under investigation are alleged to have received R5 million or more benefits through corruption. Freezing Orders were obtained against 46 persons.

In other successes, in the past financial year, 107 officials working within the criminal justice system were convicted.

The Asset Forfeiture Unit seized assets valued at more than R541 million. A total of R61 million of these assets have already been forfeited to the State. The assets are channelled back to fighting crime and corruption through the Criminal Asset Recovery Account.

Last year, additional funding of R150 million from the Criminal Assets Recovery Account was approved for the work of the Anti-Corruption Task Team which comprises the Hawks, the Special Investigating Unit and the National Prosecuting Authority.

These resources are aimed at strengthening the capacity of these law enforcement agencies in our resolve to fight corruption.

We urge the private sector to also take this fight against corruption seriously so that we tackle it from all angles.

To further boost the fight against corruption, we will fill all vacant posts at the upper echelons of the criminal justice system.

Compatriots and friends,

Honourable Members,

There are some lessons from Marikana and other incidents that we cannot allow to recur in our country.

Our Constitution is truly one of our greatest national achievements. Everything that we do as a government is guided by our Constitution and its vision of the society we are building.

We call on all citizens to celebrate, promote and defend our Constitution.

Our Bill of Rights guarantees that “everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions”.

We therefore call on our people to exercise their rights to protest in a peaceful and orderly manner.

It is unacceptable when people’s rights are violated by perpetrators of violent actions, such as actions that lead to injury and death of persons, damage to property and the destruction of valuable public infrastructure.

We are duty bound to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic. We will spare no effort in doing so.

For this reason, I have instructed the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster to put measures in place, with immediate effect, to ensure that any incidents of violent protest are acted upon, investigated and prosecuted.

Courts will be allocated to deal with such cases on a prioritised roll. The law must be enforced and it must be seen to be enforced - fairly, effectively and expeditiously.

The citizens of our country have a right to expect that their democratic state will exercise its authority in defence of the Constitution that so many struggled so long and hard for. We cannot disappoint this expectation.

The JCPS Cluster has therefore put measures in place at national, provincial and local level to deal with such incidents effectively.

Let me hasten to add that government departments at all levels must work closely with communities and ensure that all concerns are attended to before they escalate. That responsibility remains. We are a caring government.

Honourable Members,

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Organization of African Unity which has been succeeded by the African Union.

We pay tribute to the OAU for its relentless struggle for the decolonization of our continent, including contributing to our own freedom.

We will continue to work for a stronger and more effective organization of our Union.

The NEPAD programme as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism have just celebrated their tenth year of existence.

As the convener of the NEPAD Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative, South Africa continues to work with other champions to implement high impact infrastructure projects in the continent.

On peace and security, we stand by the people of Mali in their effort to claim and assert the territorial integrity of their country.

We urge the leadership in the Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau and Somalia to continue their march towards lasting peace for the sake of their people. We remain firmly opposed to unconstitutional change of government.

We are encouraged by the developments between Sudan and South Sudan. We commend our former President Thabo Mbeki and other members of the AU High Level Panel for the dedicated manner in which they have been working with the two sides.

We are in solidarity with the DRC as the country battles the menace to its security.

South Africa will continue supporting Africa's peace efforts including through mediation, troop contribution for peace keeping, and by providing material and financial assistance.

In this regard, we look forward to the conclusion of political dialogues in Zimbabwe and Madagascar.

Our vision of a better Africa in a better world will receive great impetus when we host the 5th BRICS Summit next month in Durban.

We are inspired by the exponential growth of bilateral relations, diplomatically and economically, between South Africa and other BRICS countries.

Strengthening North-South relations remains central to our foreign policy agenda.

We reaffirm our partnership with countries of the North, especially the USA, Europe and Japan.

The UN's 70th anniversary provides an opportunity to take forward the transformation of the UN Security Council.

We shall continue to use the G20 to represent the aspirations of the people of Africa and push for the transformation of Bretton Woods institutions.

South Africa's internationalism has a strong element of solidarity to it. We stand with the people of Palestine as they strive to turn a new leaf in their struggle for their right to self-determination; hence we supported their bid for statehood.

The expansion of Israeli settlements into Palestinian territories is a serious stumbling block to the resolution of the conflict.

The right of self determination for the people of Western Sahara has to be realised.

We remain firm in our call for the lifting of the economic embargo against Cuba.

Working together we can do more to create a better Africa and a better world.

Compatriots,

In the year 2012, we focused on preserving and promoting our country's cultural heritage with particular emphasis on our liberation heritage.

We also hosted a historic National Summit on Social Cohesion, focusing on building a socially inclusive, caring and proud nation.

In the implementation of our programme we will work with our Social Cohesion Advocates; eminent South Africans drawn from a variety of sectors within our society.

We are proud to have in our midst this evening, two of our eminent social cohesion advocates, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro and Advocate George Bizos.

Compatriots,

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Raid on Liliesleaf Farm, the Escape from Marshall Square as well as the Start of the Rivonia Trial.

A series of events are being planned throughout the year to mark the three events, culminating in a national commemoration on the 11th of July.

Honourable Members

We have just concluded a highly successful Africa Cup of Nations tournament. We extend hearty congratulations to the African champions, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and also to all participating teams for their contribution to showcasing the standard of African football.

We thank all our people for being excellent hosts and fans.

I had the opportunity to personally thank CAF President Honourable Issa Hayatou for affording us the honour of hosting the AFCON.

Compatriots and friends,

As I said earlier, this programme of action will be implemented differently as the activities of departments must be aligned with the National Development Plan.

Compatriots,

Before concluding, let me take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt condolences to the family of struggle stalwart and prominent human rights lawyer, Comrade Phyllis Naidoo who passed on today.

Only recently, we lost Comrade Amina Cachalia.

We are truly saddened by the loss.

Honourable Members,

Compatriots,

As South Africans, we should continue to have one primary goal - to make our country a truly great and prosperous nation.

Happy Valentine's Day to you all!

I thank you.