

# **SPEECH FOR THE PRESIDENT'S "STATE OF THE NATION" DEBATE**

**Parliament, 13/02/02**

## **Mr. Ronnie Kasrils MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**

Madame Speaker,

The President has paid tribute to "those who led the negotiations process", and the "mass of our people who, ultimately, are the true midwives of democracy". It is those same groups, whom we all represent, that must answer President Mbeki's call – Vuk'unzenzele – to build a non-racist, non-sexist, democratic country.

Mr. President despite the whinging of the chattering strata we have made massive achievements in the struggle against racism, in the fight against sexism, in the war on poverty. The new South Africa is a triumph. We are held up as the model for the world. They come from Ireland, Israel and Palestine, East Timor and Burundi, for inspiration.

Ten years ago, the doomsayers predicted race war. Through participation in our democratic process every member in this House – no matter the discordant chatter of some - stood up, and solved the problem, for the common good.

We are a triumph:

We wrote the most progressive Constitution and Bill of Rights on earth. We formed a Constitutional Court which has built a world legal reputation for sensible judgements.

We are the model.

We formed this Parliament as a free and fair expression of the will of the people. We held successful elections for new local government and a second national election. Power passed without pain from one President to another. Every party in this house agrees that South Africa is a successful, working constitutional democracy, and the Honourable Tony Leon's sour assertion that the ANC is bent on the "obsessive accumulation of power" is contradicted by his own presence here, although his fading support suggests that increasingly mature South Africans are growing weary of sour-faced whinging.

We are a triumph.

We were told that black people could not run a modern economy, that black people would bring financial ruin. Well our macro-economic fundamentals are held up as a model for a developing economy, the foundation on which jobs and growth and sustainable development will be built.

There has been steady deracialisation of all sectors of society. Where before there were only white men, there are now learned, accomplished black women and men. Amongst them a former Bantustan general with an attempt at a visual gag yesterday when he produced his Hour Glass – a good anachronistic symbol for his party.

There are now black women to be found everywhere: in cabinet, parliament, government departments, the top offices of most of the big corporations. But as we would agree with others in this debate: Minister Buthelezi and others, we are not yet at journey's end. One's colour and sex at the instant of birth are still the general indicator of whether one will be rich, educated and powerful. Our President calls on all South Africans to eliminate racism,

sexism and poverty. Which is why the "doubting Tony's" should take note of the Honourable Martinus Van Schalkwyk's reference to "providing hope rather than hopelessness" and his insightful point that had whites shown a more positive attitude in Zimbabwe there would be less strife there now.

We must take heed. There are still two worlds in our country. There are some who believe that corrective action, has gone too far, too fast. On the other hand, there are many who believe that affirmative action has been too slow, that the formerly privileged contrive to hang on to economic power and privilege at the expense of the majority.

Social equity and justice require that remedial action is desirable and will benefit all in the long run if we want harmony and peace for our children. The Honourable Dr. Mulder is concerned about geographic name changes. The Afrikaner people show themselves patriotic to South Africa and few of them pack for Perth. But what about the indigenous African names wiped out by colonial conquest. Are those to be eternally discarded? We must help all our diverse Communities to understand the need and celebrate together changes such as Limpopo Province and Polokwane. How many after all miss the old South African flag or the name H.F Verwoerd dam?.

As much as we have achieved, the Government and ANC does not claim to have done all that must be done for the poorest of the poor, the hungry and the unemployed. But the plan is in place. We say to the Honourable Minister Buthelezi, a thoughtful, sensitive man, concerned with eradicating poverty: there is still much to be done; we accept constructive criticism and learn from our mistakes. Rome was not built in one day. The President

emphasised that “many concrete steps have been taken to speed up” our effort. We are committed to ending poverty and will succeed by pulling together.

Millions of people were denied education, homes, clean water, electricity, sanitation, health services, access to land, adequate pensions and grants for children because they were black. We are delivering a better life to millions of people and are set to increase the rate and quality of delivery. Schooling has improved, but not yet solved, and the President insists that no child shall now be educated under a tree.

In the painful past these services were determined by racial preference and gender, as was security. We merged the warring armies. We transformed them into the new, professional SANDF. Members from every party in this house helped in that achievement. We saw complete consensus over the Defence Review presided over by the late Joe Modise which laid the basis for the procurement of modern weapons for a modern force that must defend our hard won sovereignty in a dangerous, unpredictable world and where our commitment to international peace-keeping in Africa is a necessity. It is a shame to back-track on such decisions to score cheap political points and the Honourable Tertius Delport needs to reconsider his sterile call for the cancellation of our procurement programme.

The transformation of our police service has been similarly astonishing. They have shown increasing mastery of difficult problems. The bombs in Cape Town have stopped. The bombers are largely in jail. Every party in this house contributed to the transformed South African Police Services. We should be proud and not succumb to the doom and gloom brigade. Yes, crime is a major problem, but is surmountable and the tide is turning.

Madam Speaker, we can rant on about crime capitals of the world or we can, to coin a phrase, "Fight Back" against crime. And this is one time we would welcome such a slogan from the DP.

Finally, I would like to comment on an area of much confusion. The HIV/AIDS controversy is raised as though we are an uncaring government. The contrary is the case.

1. Our government has always asserted that improving the health of our people (and therefore reducing poverty and increasing development) can only be done through a comprehensive multisectoral approach, that is not premised on a single disease model (such as buying antiretroviral for AIDS).
2. This is because good health relies on determinants – both social, behavioural, economic and biomedical determinants. Therefore to prevent and cure disease requires intervention in all these determinants, the most important of which is poverty. The second and third most determinants of ill health in South Africa are under-nutrition, water and sanitation.
3. Determinants of health such as the use of contaminated water act directly to cause disease, by carrying microbes such as vibrio cholera, and indirectly by causing repeated infections and worm infestations that weaken the immune system through 'exhaustion' exacerbating conditions such as AIDS. To combat AIDS therefore a multisectoral approach is needed, an approach that does not concentrate simply on supplying antiretroviral that are neither preventive nor curative, (they are claimed to extend life, but what about the quality of the 'extended' life) but by acting at the determinants of immune deficiency such as clean water, sanitation, housing, education (about sexuality), unemployment (which acts by causing poverty and psychological

depression), poisons such as tobacco and excessive alcohol, reducing pollutants such as indoor smoke through providing electrification.

4. Not only is the multisectoral approach likely to be the most effective, it is also the most sustainable in developing countries such as South Africa that are resource-limited. The approach also has the useful effect of aiding economic development, rather than simply depleting the drug budget. It overlaps with the government's comprehensive, multisectoral programme against AIDS, sexually-transmitted diseases, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases. Water and sanitation are fundamental components of the management and prevention of all these diseases.

Mr. President our congratulations for your up-beat, businesslike address to our Parliament.

We will respond to your call. We are proud to be South African.

'Vuk'unzenzele'. Pambile South Africa!