

Address at the annual opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders

Old Assembly Chamber, Parliament 22 February 2008

Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders, Khosi F P Kutama,
Deputy Chairperson of the National House, Kgosi P P Maubane,
Your Majesties and Royal Highnesses,
Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders,
Traditional leaders here present,
Our Leaders and Members of Parliament,
Ministers, Deputy Minister, Nomatyala Hangana, and other Deputy Ministers,
Our religious leaders,
Senior Government officials and other leaders of our state institutions,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I must thank you most sincerely for inviting me yet again to this august occasion, the Annual Opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders. Over the years, The Presidency and the whole of government have been hard at work to cement the relationship with this House, appreciative of the critical role this House plays and must play in the evolution of our democracy and our country.

The National House of Traditional Leaders is an important body provided for in the Constitution of our country to address matters affecting local communities.

Chairperson,

The NHTL was reconstituted in May 2007, the year that marked its 10 years of existence in our democratic dispensation. This act of reconstituting the NHTL saw changes in the leadership of the House brought about by elections of new members. In this regard, I would like to reiterate my congratulations to Khosi Kutama for retaining his position as the Chairperson, and Kgosi Maubane, for the position of the Deputy Chairperson.

Equally, I am honoured once more to congratulate all members of the NHTL who entered the democratic contest for the leadership of this important House.

The positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are not symbolic positions but leadership positions that require the two full time members to speak and act on behalf of the entire traditional leadership community on a daily basis. It requires that the NHTL must work together with the Provincial Houses and Local Houses of Traditional Leaders in the spirit of cooperative governance.

Chairperson,

Government has forged unbreakable ties with this House on a wide range of key issues since its establishment more than ten years ago, during which time we have seen the House develop to the formidable institution it is today.

This day thus marks another important milestone for the House as it continues with its very important and primary task of promoting the interests of traditional communities in our country.

Critically, government remains committed to the improvement of what has been achieved thus far, and further commits itself to protect and enhance the role which the institution of traditional leadership ought to play in responding to the national agenda.

Equally, government has had a number of fruitful and mutually beneficial interactions with this House during the course of last year further to enhance and strengthen this sound relationship between government and traditional leaders.

A number of government departments have responded well to the request we made to them, which Minister Mufamadi pursued, encouraging them to work with traditional leaders, including the allocation of roles and functions to traditional leaders and their councils as provided for in the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003.

To this end an Inter-Departmental Committee has been established to realise this objective. This Committee will focus on ensuring that the relevant government departments do indeed involve traditional leaders in programmes affecting traditional communities, further ensuring that certain functions are allocated to traditional leaders and traditional councils in terms of the Framework Act.

The three spheres of government held their regular annual planning session last month, the January Cabinet Lekgotla. Whilst affirming that progress has been made towards ensuring that this institution participates effectively in governance, we also agreed that a lot more needs to be done.

In this regard, government has given due consideration to what has been done, focused on what could not be achieved, and then developed an action plan to address the remaining challenges. This action plan is part of the overarching Government-Wide Programme of Action.

Our major challenge revolves around the implementation of legislation and programmes right across the country. In this context, you will recall that Cabinet approved the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance in 2003.

The national framework legislation was subsequently enacted in the same year and provinces followed suit with the complementary provincial legislation. Importantly, government appreciates the contributions by the traditional leaders in making these national and provincial processes a success.

While some provinces are still in the process of finalising the required legislation dealing with the Local Houses of Traditional Leaders, we can safely say that the policy and legislative foundations are now firmly in place.

We applaud the manner in which provinces that received or released traditional communities as a result of the re-determination of provincial boundaries dealt with the issue.

The Department of Provincial and Local Government also supported the provinces of Gauteng and Northern Cape in drafting their Provincial Legislation on Traditional Leadership and setting up provincial offices.

These provinces had received traditional communities for the first time after the re-determination of provincial boundaries. On behalf of government I would also like to thank the support by traditional leaders in all these processes.

Currently we are hard at work engaged in efforts of refining the legislative framework in respect of traditional leadership. For example, the bill dealing with the civil and criminal jurisdiction of traditional leaders is currently being finalised by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development and will be tabled in Parliament by the end of May.

We thank the traditional leaders for their cooperation and contributions during the consultations on this Bill. This process has further strengthened the relationship and mutual understanding between

government and traditional leaders on the role traditional leaders play in the administration of justice in the country.

The implementation of the Framework Act on Traditional Leadership has revealed that the Act requires further refinement, especially as regards the issues of the efficient functioning of the Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims Commission.

Equally, more refinement is required with regard to institutional support to our Kings and Queens and other challenges regarding provincial peculiarities. The necessary Bill is currently being drafted and will be subjected to a process of public consultation before its enactment.

Secondly, the regulations dealing with the role of Kings and Queens will be finalised during the current year, and government appreciates the valuable contributions made by our honourable Kings and Queens in this process.

Chairperson and Honourable Members,

Undoubtedly you took note of the issues I raised when I delivered the State of the Nation Address on February 8th. As we indicated, one of the most pressing areas of focus for government revolves around accelerating the implementation of our programmes. We must approach our work with regard to the institution of traditional leadership informed by the same sense of urgency.

At the strategic level, we have made progress in the following areas of focus:

- the building and strengthening of the capacity of the state to ensure that government will be able fully to implement all our agreed programmes. To this end, Cabinet decided in May 2007 that there was a need to enhance the capacity of the state at national level to support the institution of traditional leadership. An in-depth analysis of the capacity of the national government in this regard has been finalised. A report has been presented to The Presidency, and this will serve before Cabinet in March. We will report to you on the decisions taken.
- the implementation of the Comprehensive National Programme of Support for the Institution of Traditional Leadership has already begun in many different forms at national and provincial levels; and,
- to a large extent, with the traditional leaders and government working together, we have also succeeded in ensuring the internal transformation of the institution of traditional leadership by ensuring that its work, operations and activities are firmly in line with the principles set out in the Constitution, policy and legislation. This also covers the establishment and operationalisation of the new structures provided for in law.

Chairperson,

As I announced some time ago, the National Programme of Support for our Traditional Leadership has been formulated. The primary focus of this programme is the following:

- providing support to all the structures within the institution of traditional leadership to ensure that they function properly and maximally in terms of the new legislative framework;
- provision of resources to the structures serving the institution, including human and other resources;
- the development of the required skills of traditional leaders and staff supporting the institution; and,
- the involvement of the institution of traditional leadership in development processes.

Consultations focusing on the content of the Programme have taken place with stake holders, including traditional leaders, Cabinet, the Local Government MinMec, the parliamentary Portfolio Committee, the Presidential Coordinating Council and many government departments. All these stakeholders and bodies supported the Programme. The Programme is now being costed, and will be launched this year.

The Minister for Provincial and Local Government has met with his departmental team recently, during which the Minister emphasised the following:

- the immediate finalisation of all outstanding issues which have been the subject of discussion between the traditional leaders and government;
- the development of a high-level action plan to address matters which have to be dealt with and finalised during the 2008/2009 financial year; and,
- the crafting of a comprehensive action plan covering long term issues.

Indeed, when we meet again within the next few months to debate and consider the issues I have raised, we will be able to exchange detailed information on the progress made regarding these commitments, as well as those that were made in 2007.

The national programme of support referred to above constitutes a very important transformative tool. For government's efforts to bear fruit, we need your support and wholehearted cooperation.

Additionally, government is also aware of the challenges relating to the well-being of traditional leaders and all members of structures within the institution of traditional leadership. The Commission for the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers, in consultation with government as well as Houses of Traditional Leaders, is investigating these matters and in due course an announcement will be made in this regard.

In this regard, in keeping with the undertaking I made to this House, I did convey your feelings to the Chairperson of the Remuneration Commission. Fortunately the Commission agreed to engage you in further consultations. However, I must repeat that I consider it very important and necessary that the President should respect the views and determinations of the Commission.

Beyond this, I would like to underline that we will continue to focus on the further strengthening of the institution of traditional leadership this year. In this context I am happy to convey our sincere appreciation of the participation of the traditional leaders in the transformation of traditional authorities to traditional councils and the establishment of Local Houses of Traditional Leaders.

The gender and other quotas have been achieved in all of these structures and in certain instances exceeded. This has further contributed to the acceptance of these structures by society in general. I am happy to announce that 65% of traditional councils have already been transformed, while 70% of Local Houses have been established.

The challenge for traditional leaders is that they now should assume an active role in the newly reconstituted Councils and newly established Local Houses to ensure that their communities participate meaningfully in development and service delivery initiatives in their communities as these structures are the vehicle for development and service delivery in traditional communities through cooperative partnerships, as envisaged in the Framework Act.

In this regard, I would like to make the following specific commitments. Government will:

- ensure the establishment of all the institutions provided for in the law, and through which traditional leaders perform their public duties;
- ensure the provision of adequate resources and infrastructure to enable these institutions to function effectively;

- manage the assignment, by numerous State organs, of the statutory functions set out in the law, and build the capacity of traditional leaders so that they are able to perform those and other functions;
- ensure that administrative support is provided to the Houses of Traditional Leaders and Traditional Councils in order to improve governance, performance and accountability;
- develop and implement a comprehensive skills development programme for traditional leadership;
- coordinate the involvement of our traditional leadership in intergovernmental matters and in development initiatives;
- align the strategic plans and budgets of government and those of the institution; and,
- together with you, develop mechanisms aimed at facilitating the evaluation of the performance of traditional leadership and other organs of state working closely with the institution.

Chairperson,

The relationship between the Nation House and the UNISA Centre for African Renaissance Studies is key to the cultural and political enrichment of this House. The establishment of the Think Tank under the leadership of the Prof. Shadrack Ghutto, a Constitutional expert, will not only advance the agenda of the National House of Traditional Leaders but will assist the entire institution of traditional leadership further to enhance the quality of its work.

Accordingly, the symbiotic relationship between the institution of traditional leaders and the UNISA Think Tank in key categories such as Culture, Legislation and Arts will only serve to advance our developmental objectives as a nation.

Chairperson,

The National House met with the Minister of Education in 2007 to discuss matters affecting the improvement of the education of our children. As government we appreciate these efforts as it is important that traditional leadership regard education as one of the priority areas in their work.

It is equally important that children are encouraged to take subjects that will eliminate the scarce skills facing South Africa today. Our challenge as government is to produce learners and graduates with the necessary skills to contribute to the economic growth of the country against the background of hostile global economic environment.

I hope that this House will join the national discussion of the Pledge that Government has proposed should be recited by our pupils as they convene at their schools everyday. We believe that it is important that our children should grow up fully conscious of the noble value system contained in our Constitution.

Chairperson,

As you know poverty remains one of the pressing key challenges facing our society. During the SONA we mentioned as one of the Apex Priorities the intensification of the fight against this scourge. Again we will seek to work closely with our traditional leaders especially to identify and focus on the most needy households, and hope that our traditional leaders will respond to this challenge with the necessary enthusiasm.

In this regard, our traditional leaders will play a significant role in ensuring that our anti-poverty programmes make the intended impact.

Chairperson,

Once again, I must emphasise that as a custodian of our cultural values, the institution of traditional leadership occupies a strategic position in our society to provide the necessary leadership in the critical area of the moral regeneration of our nation.

In this regard, the NHTL must continue to uphold and promote sound morals and ethical practice, assisting government to raise social awareness on such challenges as crime and HIV and AIDS.

As government we are pleased at the establishment of a committee that deals specifically with issues of youth, women, children, the aged and people with disability as an indication that our traditional leadership is living up to its responsibilities by consciously focusing its attention on the most vulnerable sections of our society.

This committee must partner with the relevant Government Departments and NGO's to speed up the implementation of its programmes and capacitate the targeted sections of our population.

In addition, the developing working relationship between the National House and the Pan South African Language Board augurs well for the resuscitation and development of our indigenous languages, especially bearing in mind that language is a vehicle for cultural values and an indispensable factor of human identity.

To this end, the cooperation between the Commission on Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights and the Human Rights Commission should continue to assume strategic importance in the light of this critical challenge.

I am confident that the National House will continue to hold the flag of the institution it leads high. All our communities are faced with daunting challenges. If the various statutory traditional leadership institutions discharge their mandate effectively, we will surmount these challenges sooner rather than later. We stand ready as government to work with you in a cooperative spirit for the betterment of the lives of those we lead.

When I delivered the State of the Nation Address earlier this month, I said that our nation should unite as never before to confront our common challenges. Our Minister of Finance repeated this call when he delivered his properly targeted Budget Speech two days ago and tabled our Budget, which has been well received by the majority of our people. He said -siyimbumba!

It bodes well for our country that our traditional leaders are ready and willing fully to play their part in the common national effort to respond to our national tasks informed by the imperative of Business Unusual! I wish you well in your work. May this House realise all it has set for itself for the year.

I thank you for your attention.