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A message of unity and action

The 2015 State of the Province Address was used by North West Premier Supra Mahumapelo to outlay a clear vision for the way forward



Both the timing and location of the annual North West State of the Province address took on a new significance this year, given the return of the mortal remains of struggle stalwarts Moses Kotane and JB Marks. President Jacob Zuma oversaw their return on March 1 this year, with Kotane to be laid to rest on March 14, in his birthplace, Pella, about 100km west of Rustenburg.

This year's opening address of the North West Legislature was fittingly hosted by the Moses Kotane Local Municipality, which is seated in the town of Mogwase. In keeping with the notion of taking the provincial parliament to the people, 5?000 dignitaries and guests were invited to attend the address held at Mogwase Stadium.

“Today’s sitting in Moses Kotane Local Municipality is a fitting tribute, and [it is an] honour to be in the midst of the revolutionary spirits of Moses Kotane and JB Marks,” said Mahumapelo.

In a bid to cement this legacy, the premier announced that a process was under way to change the name of the North West to Moses Kotane Province. “This is the little we as the beneficiaries of Moses Kotane’s sacrifices and principled commitment to justice can do to repay him and his generation for the gift of freedom they have given us.” This exercise would consist of a public participation process led by the Provincial Geographic Names Committee. No timeframe on the process was announced.

The proposal mirrored the broad theme of this year’s address of Rebranding, Repositioning and Renewal of the province. The premier used his speech to expand on and give effect to this philosophy, which he introduced in last year’s address.

His philosophy is based on the need to revitalise the economy by focusing on the agriculture, culture and tourism (ACT) sectors and on investing in key economic infrastructure and enterprise development initiatives.

A key pillar of this strategy is the focus on rural and small town economies. “The majority of our people come from villages which have seen very little economic activity for many years,” said Mahumapelo. “To reverse this apartheid pattern in which villages were seen merely as supply centres of cheap labour, we need to take bold and unpopular decisions to redirect development to areas where the majority of our people reside.”

The strategy will be centred on a commitment from the provincial government to procure 70% of goods and services from villages, townships and small *dorpië*s (towns), and the creation of co-operatives aimed specifically at benefitting small vendors.

This process will commence with the establishment of a database of all formal and informal businesses in the province’s 383 wards.

The core of this approach has been dubbed *saamwerk-saamtrek* (work together, pull together) — a call by the provincial government to recognise that development is only possible through a unified approach.

“To overcome the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality which are complicated by sluggish economic growth, we have embarked on the necessary Rebranding, Repositioning and Renewal of this province as an instrument to implement the National Development Plan,” he said. “In this regard, among other things, we must strive at all times collectively to be the best in all aspects of life as a province. Mediocrity should not be our perpetual refuge of comfort.”

In keeping with the *saamwerk-saamtrek* theme, Mahumapelo’s address was littered with messages of reconciliation and outreach. He said that his office would be the lead champion of engagement forums with the Afrikaner communities in the province to send a clear message that it “belongs to all who live in it, black and white”.

“We congratulate the Afrikaner community for their proactive co-operation and embrace of the 50-50 model presented by Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti. However, more still needs to be done to improve both the situation and relations between some farmers and their farmworkers,” he said.

Reflecting on achievements over the past 20 years, the premier singled out the progress that had been made in improving the lives of people in the province, particularly in the areas of education, health and infrastructure.

He noted that the proportion of people without formal education had dropped to only 8% by 2013, that more than 2370000 houses had been built since 1994 and that 89% of the population now had access to clean drinking water.

He acknowledged that this record was not faultless, and required continued commitment to development and delivery. To that end, his government had introduced a number of programmes to address these shortcomings. This included extensive investment in the capital city of Mahikeng, which the province intends to develop into a leading centre in the country. Mahumapelo said that R140-million had been set aside for the ambitious Rebranding, Repositioning and Renewal Plan for Mahikeng, across 23 infrastructure projects.

The Mmabatho Convention Centre will be expanded into an international convention centre and the soccer stadium refurbished and made into a world-class facility. Transport infrastructure will be revamped. This will involve upgrading the Pilanesberg International Airport, making the Mahikeng Airport (soon to be renamed the Kgosi Montshioa Airport) into a logistics cargo hub and re-establishing Mahikeng-Johannesburg rail services. An agreement with the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa is to be signed in coming weeks and will include upgrading the infrastructure in Magalies, Koster, Swaruggens, Zeerust, Groot Marico and Mahikeng.

Water and sanitation infrastructure will benefit from R1.9-billion made available by the national department of water affairs, while road infrastructure continues to benefit from commitments of more than R1-billion from the Presidential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Committee.

“Successful implementation of these projects will, to a greater extent, address the current challenges of water supply at various areas such as Madibeng, Bloemhof, Schweizer-Reneke, Setlagole, Mafikeng, and the like,” he said. “The delivery model shall be through a shared services model co-ordinated by the department of finance, economy and enterprise development.”

The premier said that administrative problems were being addressed and that forensic investigations had been instituted in the departments of health, public works and roads, the North West Parks and Tourism Board and Potch Agricultural College. At a local level, investigations were underway at the Ditsotla Local Municipality, Ngaka Modiri Molema and Matlosana Local Municipality.

“In line with the commitment made in this house last year, once completed and subject to necessary legal requirements, all outcomes of these investigations will be shared with this house and the public,” Mahumapelo told the gathering. “We can also report to the people of this province that the report to the legislature on this matter will also have clear action plans [based] on recommendations from such reports.”

He concluded by thanking all sectors of society and government for their commitment to improving the lives of the people of North West and reiterated that the Freedom Charter would continue to inform his government’s transformation agenda.

The 2016 State of the Province address will be hosted by the Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality.

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