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## President Kgalema Motlanthe's first State of the Nation Address

**Date:** Sunday, September 28, 2008

Fellow South Africans,

I am deeply honoured and privileged to address you this evening as your President. Before I continue with my message I would like to pay my last respects to Mrs Nomkitha Virginia Mashinini, mother of Tsietsi Mashinini, the leader of the 1976 Soweto students uprising, who has just left us.

Allow me, on your behalf to convey our condolences to her children and the Mashinini family. May her soul rest in peace!

Fellow South Africans,

Our country is emerging from one of the most difficult weeks in the history of our young democracy. It has been a week of uncertainty and doubt, hurt and anger. Yet, it is at moments like this that the true character of our nation emerges.

It is when we are tested, that we demonstrate our resilience and determination. We have shown in the past that though we may at times experience difficulty, we have both the will and the means to rise above the challenges of the moment.

Over the course of the last few days, we have proven the durability of our constitutional order and the vibrancy of our democracy.

We have no choice now other than to move forward, to forge ahead undaunted with the tasks we have set ourselves.

As President of South Africa, I undertake this responsibility knowing full well the duties and responsibilities that are attached to this high office, and the expectations that the people of this nation rightly have of the head of state.

I will do everything in my power, during the time that I occupy this position, to serve the nation with dignity, commitment and humility.

In everything that this task demands, I have the good fortune to be able to draw on the example set by my immediate predecessor, President Thabo Mbeki.

I had the privilege of serving in his cabinet these last few months and working with him in the leadership of the ANC over the course of a decade.

It is difficult to reduce into mere words the contribution that President Mbeki has made to the advancement of our nation. It is to him, to his leadership, and to his vision, that we owe so much of our achievements of the last decade.

For all that he has done for South Africa, for our continent and for the advancement of the global community, we remain forever indebted.

We express our appreciation also to the ministers and deputy ministers who served under President Mbeki, for the service they have rendered the nation.

Fellow South Africans,

As government, we have moved quickly to bring stability to the country's national executive, confirming the positions of ministers and deputy ministers, and filling any vacancies that have arisen.

On Friday, these ministers and deputy ministers were sworn in by the Chief Justice, Pius Langa, fulfilling our undertaking that there should be no interruption to the activities of government.

We are humbled by the support the new Cabinet has received from many quarters, and welcome the timely words of advice and caution from others.

To succeed in these important tasks, as we strive to build a new nation, it is necessary that we harness all the available skills, talent and experience that our nation possesses. This government will therefore work to draw on the collective abilities of all South Africans as we strive to achieve our goals.

In 2004, the people of South Africa gave this government a clear mandate to forge a people's contract to create work and fight poverty.

All our efforts in the months to come will remain focused on the primary tasks set out in the 2004 mandate, namely:

- to reduce unemployment and poverty by half within 10 years;
- to provide the skills required by the economy;
- to ensure all South Africans are fully able to exercise their constitutional rights;
- to provide compassionate and competent service to the people;
- to massively reduce cases of TB, diabetes, malnutrition and maternal deaths, and turn the tide against HIV and AIDS;
- to effectively reduce the number of serious and priority crimes, with a programme that also addresses the social roots of criminality; and,
- to position South Africa strategically as an effective force in global relations.

We can say now with confidence that this government, working together with the people, has indeed made significant progress in fulfilling this mandate.

Together, we have sustained higher levels of economic growth, that has created jobs at an accelerated pace, and that has enabled government to dedicate greater resources to meeting the basic needs of our people.

Together, we have made significant advances in the provision of housing, electricity, water, sanitation and other basic services to many who did not have before.

And together we have improved the access of poor South Africans to health care, education and social security.

All this we have been able to achieve because we have worked together, in a spirit of partnership and cooperation.

But much work still lies ahead.

Our country faces many challenges, and our people still endure many hardships.

Yet by working together – by building on what we have achieved, by acknowledging our shortcomings, by learning from experience – we will be able to make even further progress in improving the lives of our people.

Working together, we will continue to grow our economy so that it can meet the needs of our people.

Even under difficult global conditions, we will remain true to the course that we have set, knowing that we have done what is necessary to weather the storm.

This government has dedicated significant resources for investment in social and economic infrastructure. As we implement this programme, we will continue to focus our

efforts on creating decent, sustainable jobs.

Together we will continue the work to expand access to quality education and healthcare to all our people, especially the poor.

We remain determined to stamp out crime, violence and abuse, wherever it affects and wherever it manifests itself.

The crisis in the global economy and the rise in prices of basic goods across the world have been felt in this country, particularly by the poor.

It is therefore critical that we dedicate attention to the implementation of government's War on Poverty, ensuring that we bring much-needed relief to the poorest households.

We will continue to meet our international obligations, and to play a positive role within international institutions and forums. We will continue to provide whatever assistance we can in the pursuit of peace, security, democracy and development in Africa.

As you know, the 2010 FIFA World Cup is one of our major projects as a nation and a continent.

We are confident that, working together, we will host the best FIFA World Cup ever. As a nation, let us welcome the world to our country, demonstrating the friendly hospitality for which we are well-known.

Working together with the people, this government will continue to lead the national effort to build a society in which all South Africans have equal access to rights and opportunities.

This government will continue to dedicate every day that it remains in office towards the achievement of this goal.

Next year, South Africans will go to the polls in the country's fourth democratic elections for national and provincial government.

It is an opportunity for you, the people of South Africa, to once more take a hand in determining your own future.

It is an opportunity to exercise your hard-won democratic right to choose a government that will respond to your needs and champion your interests.

These elections are a crucial part of the effort to build a truly participatory democracy, in which all our people play an active role in all matters that affect them.

That is why we will continue to work to ensure that people participate in directing the daily work of government, and are practically involved in building the country.

We therefore call on all South Africans, particularly the youth, to act now to ensure that you will be able to exercise your right on Election Day.

We urge all those who have not registered to vote, to do so now.

You can do so either at your nearest municipal office, or on the weekend of 8 and 9 November, when all voting stations will open for voter registration.

Fellow South Africans,

In everything that we do, we are guided by the vision of the Freedom Charter, which said that:

"South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."

This vision is all-encompassing. It does not exclude any single South African. Nor does it allow that any person has any greater claim than any other to being an integral part of this nation.

Just as we all have an equal claim to this country, we all have an equal obligation to build a society that is united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous.

This is a task for all of us – for government, for communities, for non-governmental

organisations, for workers, for business, and for all sectors in which our people are organised.

Fellow South Africans,

When I addressed the National Assembly this last Thursday, I said:

“ We will not allow that the work of government be interrupted. We will not allow the stability of our democratic order to be compromised. And we will not allow the confidence that our people have in the ability of the state to respond to their needs to be undermined.”

At this moment in our history, as we stand poised to make still further advances towards the achievement of a better life, it is as important as ever that we stand united as a nation. Never before has South Africa been closer than it is today towards the achievement of a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous nation.

We therefore have a shared responsibility to build on these results and to strive together – sparing neither courage nor strength – towards the achievement of a better South Africa, a better Africa and a better world.

Together, we can only succeed.

I thank you.

