

Address of the Premier of Mpumalanga, Thabang Makwetla, at the second joint sitting of the third democratic legislature

Nelspruit 18 February 2005

Madame Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Mpumalanga Legislature

Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders in Mpumalanga, Chief Mashele

Members of the Executive Council

Honourable Members of the Mpumalanga Legislature and Members of Parliament

Chief of the SANDF General Sphiwe Nyanda

Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal Honourable S'bu Ndebele

Esteemed Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Judge President Bernard Ngoepe

Deputy Judge President Phineas Mojapelo

Former Premier of Mpumalanga Dr. Matthews Phosa

Former Premier of Mpumalanga N J Mahlangu

The royalty of our province, Amakhosi Le Magosi

Honourable Speaker of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature

The Auditor-General and Head of the Public Service Commission in our province

Honourable mayors and Leaders of SALGA

Heads of Department and Heads of our Parastatals

Distinguished Guests, Comrades and Friends

Compatriots

We have converged enthusiastically in Nelspruit again, from different corners of our province and beyond, to mark and celebrate the commencement of the second inning of the Third Mpumalanga Legislature since the advent of our democracy in the year 1994. We symbolically celebrate this occasion as it marks the beginning of yet another challenging round to push back poverty and to free many hopeful South Africans in this province from the trap of underdevelopment.

As the administration of this province we address this august body today, in the wake of a watershed development in the endeavour of the people of this province to rid themselves of the burden of underdevelopment and poverty, the Badplaas Growth and Development Summit on the 7 and 8 th February 2005.

Madame Speaker, Mpumalanga has been from immemorial a zone of interaction between different societies and a crucible of critical social, economic and cultural developments. It is this heritage of interaction and innovation, of accommodation and conflict that constitute the treasure trove we must dig deep into to confront the challenges of today.

In this context, the social contract entered into at the Badplaas Summit, and the collective leadership spirit among all social partners, is the heritage we must reclaim in the many facets of society in this province as we remake ourselves.

Madame Speaker, this province is one of the intriguing regions of our country. We contain evidence of the earliest phases of the evolution of our planet more than three million years ago. We have some of the evidence of the presence and lifestyle of modern human beings in Southern Africa, dating as far back as the Middle Stone Age, 50 000 or more years ago. We also have evidence of later Stone Age lifestyles all in this province. This inspirational heritage must make us want not to be ordinary.

Our country has made great progress in all areas since our liberation in 1994. This has been achieved through the efforts of all South Africans, black and white. Whatever problems might still exist, resulting from the difficulty among some to outgrow the racist attitudes of the past, we can say that many among our white compatriots have responded to the call made by Nelson Mandela that they should join the process of shaping the new South Africa.

All of us are called upon by history to add to the canvas as we paint a Mpumalanga of hope and opportunity. It is a tapestry we continue to weave for the sake of our children and generations to come. We know that as architects of a future that is gradually moving away from a past riddled with conflict, hatred and suspicion, we may not finish this painting because it is indeed a long story of determination, perseverance and a dogged belief that ours was and remains the right course.

As we seek to create a genuinely democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous country, we had as our beacon the People's document, the Freedom Charter whose 50 th anniversary we celebrate this year.. Through the Charter we set out to build a single nation founded on justice and opportunity.

Today as we stand here we know that this is not only possible, but an imperative if we are to rightly claim that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white. We know this is within our reach, because we are driven by a power larger than ourselves. And we are confident in the principles that unite and lead us onward, because we are bound by a common vision and lofty ideals.

The First Decade of Freedom has provided the platform for us to move forward faster, with better quality of outputs and better outcomes in building a society that cares.

In his State of the Nation address last Friday President Thabo Mbeki said:

"... during each one of the years that make up our Second Decade of Liberation, including this one, we must achieve new and decisive advances towards..(inter alia) eradicating poverty and underdevelopment, within the context of a thriving and growing First Economy and the successful transformation of a Second Economy"

It is our considered view as Mpumalanga that this year ought to be one where our province begins to make serious advances on employment creation.

It should be a year where all our efforts are **TOWARDS OPPORTUNITIES FOR DECENT WORK AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A VIBRANT PEOPLE-CENTRED PROVINCE.**

Let us make bold the assertion that the journey towards Vision 2014, the journey towards halving poverty and unemployment by 2014, has begun in earnest.

Imisebenzi, Mesomo, Werkskepping, Jobs , should be our rallying cry, in a year where we shall seek to advance decisively in improving the lives of our people.

Last week our province successfully hosted a Provincial Growth and Development Summit. The Badplaas Summit marked a significant departure from how we have approached our work in the past. As a result of this Summit, we are happy to report to this august house today, that the provincial government and all its social partners in the province now have an elaborate plan or a blue print for addressing the growth and development challenges facing our province.

I am happy to report to all present today, that for the first time in our province, representatives of government, organized business including the agricultural sector, organized labour, and community organizations, have pledged to work together to address the socio economic development challenges facing the province.

In the Summit Agreement signed by representatives of the various stakeholders that we have mentioned, we have all committed to transform the province into one that is:

- An attractive proposition for both domestic and foreign investors as well as visitors
- A province that is no longer an example of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment.
- A province of equitable and wide-ranging development opportunities for the citizens.
- An area where high levels of education and health are attained.
- A province where the delivery of social services is the norm.

The road that lies ahead in the implementation of the various Summit agreements is certainly going to be very steep, sometimes even slippery too. However, we are confident that the collective spirit and efforts that characterized the preparations towards the Summit will be doubled into the future.

This Summit has given our people across the length and breadth of the province hope that a future without destitution and hunger is possible. Our people are now aware that a collective will exists to make a difference in their lives. We dare not fail them.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Madame Speaker, honourable members, as the President said in his State of the Nation address on Friday last week, we enter another year inside the longest economic upswing of the business cycle of our economy in the post World War II period.

Our country's economy has been growing at a rate faster than our expectations in recent periods. The latest Gross Domestic Product figures released by Statistics South Africa on Tuesday reveal that real annual GDP increased by 3.7 percent in 2004 following an increase of 2.8 per cent in 2003.

Indeed our national economy continues to move on a buoyant economic growth path and is achieving growth performances that were unheard of in the decade before 1994.

In line with the projections of the Presidency, the National Treasury, and the SA Reserve Bank, we have every reason to remain confident about the economy in the short to medium-term.

Therefore we view our immediate task as being to ensure that Mpumalanga must share in this positive growth experience and optimism in the country.

In this regard, it is heartening and exciting that some of the mega investment projects referred to by the President, last week, are located firmly in our province, as reported also at our Provincial Growth and Development Summit by Eskom and SASOL.

Madame Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to commend Eskom, Sasol and Vuka Forests for their exemplary commitment to invest more and help create opportunities for jobs in the province through the plans they tabled at the PGDS Summit.

Eskom is bringing back into service three previously decommissioned power stations, at Camden (Ermelo), Komati (Middelburg), and Grootvlei (Balfour), that will result in the creation of 26 000 jobs both directly and indirectly in Mpumalanga alone over the next five years..

SASOL is investing in a R12 billion project, which commenced in January, to expand downstream value chain beneficiation in the chemical industry, Vuka Forests has passionately committed to creating 855 jobs in the next eighteen months within the forestry industry.

These projects are a massive boost to our province. We will be setting up a high level team that will regularly interact with Eskom and also ensure that we maximize benefits to the province in terms of; infrastructure development, training and skills development, transportation, black economic empowerment and SMME development.

We wish to again commend all the companies that outlined their investment and employment creation plans at the Summit, which included **SASOL, TSB, AngloCoal, Vuka Forests, SAPPI, Eskom** and **Forever Resorts**.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Since our presentation before you last year, the provincial government has made significant strides with regard to the provision of support to our economic growth drivers in the various key sectors of our economy.

We have on various occasions travelled throughout the province in order to meet some of our major economic role players and I am happy to report that all those that we met surprised us with their patriotism and commitment to partner us in addressing the socio-economic challenges that we face.

The visits to the various companies, have contributed to an improved understanding within government of the market, regulatory and infrastructural challenges that our established businesses face.

As part of the response to the urgent challenges presented by the state of our development infrastructure in the province, the provincial government is close to completing two thirds of the planned output with regards to the construction and maintenance of roads for the 2004/5 financial year.

In a bid to further improve the conditions of our roads in the Gert Sibande region, we have commenced with the upgrading and rehabilitation of roads. In January this year we started work on the 18km stretch between Amersfoort and Daggakraal. It is expected to be completed by January 2007. Work on the road between Bethal and Kriel was started last September and is expected to be completed by June 2006. The Carolina - Wonderfontein road was also started in September 2004 and is expected to be completed at the same time.

Apart from addressing the state of our roads, we will manage transport logistics, corridor development, freight, aviation and rail related matters, as part of a comprehensive response to transport infrastructure needs in our province.

In line with the Provincial Growth and Development Summit agreement we will approach these infrastructure matters in a manner that takes into account the views of our social partners. Within the next few months we will begin discussions with our social partners, other tiers of government, and state owned enterprises, about the possibility of Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements for infrastructure development and improvement where the benefits of such investments will accrue directly to the province.

The government's ability to support key economic sector's in the province, and to co-ordinate much needed interventions for broadening development and participation in our regional economy, was given a major boost last year in the reconfiguration of departments which included the establishment of a Department for Economic Development and Planning; a Department for Roads and Transport; and a stand alone provincial Treasury.

These new institutional arrangements will increasingly contribute to an improvement in our performance and work. During the past eight months, the new Department of Economic Development and Planning played an important role in the provision of support for the Tourism sector and in the opening up of opportunities for previously disadvantaged individuals in the Stainless Steel cluster.

As part of opening up opportunities for broad participation of previously marginalised communities in our provincial economy we extended the production capacity of the Stainless Steel Cluster Initiative in Middelburg by adding 10 more mini-factories at the cost of R15million. A BEE Directorate is also being established within the Department of Economic Development and Planning.

We hosted a Tourism Indaba in August 2004 where stakeholders committed to, among other things, establishing a knowledge and information sharing facility for best practice. We are establishing centres for information dissemination in the tourism sector and are developing the relevant human resources for tourism in the community. In addition, 124 Tourism Youth Monitors were deployed across the province and a Tourism Fun Train was launched amidst much hype and excitement in September 2004.

We intend to actively support the implementation of the resolutions of the Tourism Indaba in a manner that expands the contribution of this sector to the provincial economy whilst also broadening participation by those from previously marginalised communities.

SECOND ECONOMY

A foundation is being laid for a more inclusive economy through initiatives that focus on what is now commonly referred to as the 'second economy'.

As a province we are on track with our goal of creating 10 000 temporary employment opportunities by the end of the 2004/2005 financial year.

For the 2005/6 financial year, this programme is targeting to create 20 000 jobs in the province. This is double the number of work opportunities that were created since August 2004.

In line with the call from our President, we will facilitate the identification and implementation of more Early Childhood Development (ECD), Education, and Home Community Based Care (HCBC), Health and Social services projects.

As part of the EPWP, there will be a further strengthening of the implementation of the EPWP learnership, and the EPWP life-skills training and skills programme. We will explore the possible role of co-operatives in the EPWP whilst also increasing co-ordination of the programme across provincial government departments and between different spheres of government in our province.

Apart from the EPWP, a major effort to provide work opportunities for our people and in the places where they live will be promoted through a more vigorous implementation of Local Economic Development (LED).

I am happy to announce that in consultation with our various stakeholders, and in partnership with institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) we will also be developing a provincial LED strategy. This strategy will serve as a guide for all of us across different spheres of government, and in the different areas where we live, on how to develop and apply community-driven initiatives to create jobs and eradicate poverty.

Extensive support has been provided to emerging farmers through the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP). R10million was provided for relief efforts of the drought situation.

Through a viable partnership with our agricultural research institutions and the implementation of the national Agricultural Sector Plan, we will aim to improve the agriculture's contribution to wealth creation in our province, and particularly our rural areas.

The abundance of arable land remains our province's competitive advantage in our fight against poverty. We have an advantage which other provinces do not have of providing opportunities for livelihoods to thousands of the province's landless peasantry by putting more families back on the land and supporting them to eke out a meaningful existence. To this end the province will roll out an improved support programme for those who want to go back to the land. As a start, in this financial year government will spend R15 million to support farming in our rural communities.

We believe that this innovative programme will go a long way to assist the province to achieve the goal of halving poverty by 2014.

The critical area of access to finance for our small and emerging entrepreneurs has led to various initiatives since we stood before you last year.

The launch of the Provincial Equity Fund, in partnership with Standard Bank, was a major highlight for the province during the past year. The primary objective of the fund is to broaden access to finance in order to accelerate higher levels of investment in the Province.

In order to create an environment conducive to enterprise development, the regulatory environment should be transparent and predictable to both the business community and consumers.

We shall be finalising the process of harmonizing our provincial gambling legislation with the national gambling legislation, and the provincial liquor legislation with the national liquor legislation.

In line with the Provincial Growth and Development Summit Agreement, Government will identify and amend regulations within the control of provincial and local government that may be unduly contributing towards the cost of doing business and undermining SMME development, including hawkers and micro enterprises.

During the course of the year we will be rolling out the Small Enterprise Development Agency, SEDA, to assist SMMEs to access information on business opportunities. Consultations will take place with all the Districts and other important stakeholders to solicit support for SEDA.

At the same time, the programme of co-operatives will also be rolled out in line with the national Co-operatives legislation.

CHALLENGES

Despite these concerted efforts on our part, there are outstanding gaps in our work and some of our planned targets have not been met.

As a province we have not been able to provide a comprehensive response to the challenge of reducing the cost of doing business in Mpumalanga.

The beneficiation of our products into intermediate and processed goods remains a challenge.

Support to emerging farmers, and the provision of pre-and post settlement support to those communities that have received land as part of the restitution process, has not been undertaken in a manner that meets all our expectations inspite of the availability of government resources for these needs.

Access to finance and non-financial assistance for small entrepreneurs has been a major shortcoming in the province.

Many of these broad areas of under achievement can be attributed to 'growing pains' of our institutional frameworks and restructuring processes, which have often been beyond our control.

This is further compounded by capacity constraints that afflict Departments, especially those that rely on particular scarce expertise, such as the Department of Roads and Transport.

As we have observed on various occasions, access to the Maputo harbour through the Maputo Corridor is an important competitive advantage for Mpumalanga but for various historical reasons the province has not optimised the existence of the Maputo Development Corridor.

However, this situation will be addressed as a matter of urgency. Government will in the next 100 days set up structures for investigating and implementing the remaining pillars of the Maputo Development Corridor.

Mining remains a significant part of our provincial economy and in the coming year we intend to promote the broadening of participation in the sector whilst supporting increased investment and beneficiation activities.

In collaboration with national government we will set up the Mpumalanga Preferential Procurement Forum where a database of mining companies operating in the province will be stored. This Forum will assist those mining companies seeking to establish relationships with supplier firms from the previously disadvantaged communities.

THREATS

We have continuously observed that Mpumalanga is a province with immense potential but is facing numerous challenges in translating this potential into a competitive platform for growth and sustainable human development.

In these days of 'globalization' and the easy movement of capital and investments across regions and borders, the presence of the natural resource endowments such as those found in the province is unfortunately no guarantee for success.

Indeed, some of the countries and regions that are today examples of development success, such as those in South East Asia would be envious of the rich mineral deposits and tourism potential found in Mpumalanga. We need to begin thinking more aggressively about attaining dynamic competitive advantage rather than a static competitive advantage based on existing capabilities.

In addressing the employment and poverty challenges that we face we are very much intent on devising a critical minimum package of measures that can more boldly begin to reduce the high rates of unemployment.

Our plan is to ensure that such measures are carefully coordinated and targeted with regard to their impact on the labour force, business people, industries and localities.

They need to be structured such that they maximise the synergy of their outcomes in a mutually reinforcing and sustainable manner with the broad goal being to progressively absorb the unemployed into productive activities and begin to uplift the poorest and most deprived members of our community.

The various initiatives and proposals that we are announcing today, regarding the provincial economy, are part of a serious effort on our part to demonstrate commitment to the objectives of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and the Provincial Growth and Development Summit Agreement documents.

We have tried to take the lead and to strongly suggest that together as stakeholders we can promote broad based development and employment as our provincial priority.

During the next twelve months we shall be relying on all the delivery agencies of government, including our parastatals, to ensure that we achieve our goals.

In this regard the weaknesses presented by the separation of Mpumalanga Economic Empowerment Corporation (MEEC) and Mpumalanga Investment Initiative (MII) will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Mpumalanga Parks Board and the Mpumalanga Tourism Agency present a similar challenge. The MEC for Economic Development and Planning will immediately initiate a process to amalgamate these institutions.

Furthermore to address the problems at the MEEC and to strengthen its ability to deliver on expectations, the MEC will immediately appoint a new board and an acting CEO.

The initiatives are important steps in addressing the quality of life of our people. They are certain to augment the drive towards sustainable human development in Mpumalanga.

HOUSING

Madam Speaker, we have in the past 10 months, provided shelter to 8 683 households. Other projects include the construction of storm water drainage at Kabokweni at an amount of R577 098 00, replacement of high mast lighting at Emjindini at an amount of R4m.

In early April we will commence with Phase 2 of the public-private sector partnership Emalahleni Presidential Job Summit project building 1 000 units at a cost of R130m. The Mbombela Rental Stock Project will commence with planning and rezoning in 2005/06 and the production of 500 units in 2005/7.

In the Steve Tshwete municipality we are succeeding in managing informal settlement development by providing temporary shelter to house evicted farm workers.

BUCKETS

Madam Speaker our ambitious plan to eradicate the bucket system by the end of March 2005 has proved unrealistic, due to huge financial shortfalls. However, Cabinet took an extra-ordinary decision to mobilize funds to realize this commitment before December 2005.

The first 6119 households in Gert Sibande District areas of Dipaleseng, Albert Luthuli, Lekwa and Msukaligwa, will be completed by the 31 st March 2005. The remaining projects will be finished by December 2005.

EDUCATION

Honourable Members, success is always the product of hard work.

The concerted effort by the Executive to pull the Education Department out of its low performance levels are beginning to bear fruit.

On behalf of the provincial Government, I wish to commend all learners, teachers, and parents for delivering the best improved matric results in the country by attaining a 3.8 percent increase in our pass rate.

The journey to the summit is still going to be daunting for all, however the 2004 performance is heartening.

In this context the unprofessional corrupt practices of some in our education system deserves our strongest condemnation. We welcome the conclusion of the investigation by the national minister and pledge to commence in the province a comprehensive enquiry into the defects and failures in our systems in order to rectify them for all times.

The Department of Education has faced various constraints, including budgetary ones that impeded plans for the construction of relevant infrastructure.

We remain committed to ensuring that the door's of learning and culture finally open to all.

In the next financial year (2005/2006), the department will increase its budget and expenditure on infrastructure in order to ensure that learners, especially those with disabilities, have an improved access to schools.

As government provides the above, Parents, Business, Magosi / Amakhosi, Church Leaders and Communities are called upon to join hands and make the education enterprise everybody's business.

The changing labour demand structure of our regional economy necessitates that we pay attention to the critical areas of education and skills development, lest we are forced to continuously import labour due to skills shortages whilst our people become unemployable.

During the next six months we will actively pursue the strengthening of our relationship with FET Colleges and the Department of Labour, in order to conduct a skills audit that can assist us to develop a provincial skills plan, in line with the soon to be launched National Skills Development Strategy 2005-2010.

By the end of the year we would have put in place a programme that would improve career guidance and bursary schemes for young people from rural areas. We will also provide rural incentives - and in particular housing - for all scarce skill health personnel.

In order to address the huge skills shortage in civil engineering in Mpumalanga, 21 bursaries were awarded to students interested in the profession, increasing the number of bursaries awarded since last year to 81. They include bursaries for project management, transport engineering and information technology.

HEALTH

Eight facilities are rolling out the elements of the Comprehensive treatment management and care on HIV and AIDS in the Province. These are Shongwe, Witbank, Embhuleni, Philadelphia, Themba, Evander, Rob-Ferreira and Bethal.

A total of 486 lay councillors are assisting in the voluntary counselling and testing programme, the province has vigorously embraced on training community health workers and to date in excess 1360 Home-Based Care Givers are receiving stipends. A total amount of R 457, 920.00 was allocated to Love Life to provide stipends and other support to a 109 Peer Councillors in the province.

In the next three months we will finalise, resource and implement comprehensive specialised health service delivery plan. To this end we shall accelerate availability of health personnel in rural areas, accelerate implementation of Iranian Exchange Program, accelerate roll-out of mid-level health workers Program - including career development paths.

By July we would have integrated municipal and provincial clinics to provide same level of services.

We will continue to accelerate access to social grants to all who are eligible. We have successfully paid 534,100 beneficiaries exceeding the target of 501, 722 we set for ourselves last year.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The administration of Social Assistance grants will soon be taken over by SASSA (South African Social Security Agency). The Agency will address key weaknesses in the current social security system which include fragmented Institutional Arrangements and lack of uniformity; Inefficient processes and high costs thereof; Budgetary and financial pressures at provincial level; fraud and corruption; and the poor quality of service delivery.

Our call for partnerships with research institutions has borne fruit. The Department of Health and Social Services has a joint research venture with SANTA, the Medical Research Council, Harvard University and other agencies to address some of the unanswered questions around Multiple Drug Resistance TB transmission and other airborne infections.

CULTURE

Since inception of the Mpumalanga Geographical Names Committee, 44 names have been approved by the National Minister of Arts and Culture and gazetted.

These names are mainly names of rural villages in the province and include the following changes: Paayzynpan to Dithagane; Ebersnake to Edludluma; Hectorspruit to Emjeane; and Kwaggafontein D to Somphalali.

A Business Plan for the 2010 Mbombela Sport Complex has been completed. The cost of putting the Mbombela Sport Complex is estimated at R335 million which still need to be raised through a Public Private Partnership. .

GOVERNANCE

Madame Speaker, as Members of this House will recall that we previously indicated that we would fully integrate the institution of traditional leadership into democratic governance and development. In order to give effect to this undertaking, the Province has prepared two draft Bills in order to achieve this goal.

The first of these Bills is the Mpumalanga Traditional Leadership and Governance Bill, 2005, which was recently published in the Provincial Gazette for public comment. The second Bill is the Mpumalanga Provincial House and Local Houses of Traditional Leaders Bill, 2005, which Bill will soon be published for public comment.

The valued input of the Mpumalanga House of Traditional Leaders on the said two Bills, cannot be over-emphasized. It is envisaged that both these Bills will be introduced in the Provincial Legislature, during 2005, for consideration and passing. The promulgation of these two pieces of Provincial Legislation will go a long way in achieving the integration of the institution of Traditional Leadership into democratic governance and development.

The Mpumalanga Initiation Schools Bill, 2005, which Bill provides for the regulation of the holding of initiation schools within the Province, has also been prepared and will similarly be published for public comment, prior to the introduction of the said Bill in the Provincial Legislature, for consideration.

In the year ahead we will see several significant developments, which will enhance our monitoring and evaluation capabilities. We hope in the not too distant future to finalise the installation of a monitoring and evaluation system in all departments and municipalities. This project has already taken off the ground.

Coupled with this we will also be implementing an Integrated Development and Planning Nerve Centre and updating the Integrated Spatial Framework.

The IDP Nerve Centre is specifically designed to strengthen the link between Local, Provincial and National Government by providing a means whereby Municipalities and Provincial Governments can maintain and communicate key planning and IDP information thereby allowing access across all levels of government.

The IDP Nerve Centre will provide integrated reporting capabilities across government enabling a consolidated view of planning decisions across government spheres thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness, impact and alignment of all development decisions.

All projects and development must be aligned to IDP's and must link to the Strategic Plans and PGDS before the IDP Nerve Centre will allow a project to proceed. This will enable National and Provincial government to monitor all projects thus ensuring that they comply with the Vision and Plan of the Government.

SKILLS AUDIT

Two companies have been appointed to conduct the Skill Audit, which is expected to be completed in the next four months.

This exercise will help in identifying gaps in the managers and also help in empowerment of managers with appropriate skills, which will ultimately lead to better service delivery in the province. This will also help the process of introducing a Performance Management System in the Public Service. I am happy to report that the SAB has offered to pilot this project in the provincial administration.

The Service Delivery Review Audit on Disability that took place in September 2004 was a major instrument in assessing government's performance in increasing access to services and opportunities for people with disabilities. It is our objective that this report will form the basis for planning and intervention with regard to disability matters.

In relation to Transformation we will ensure effective implementation of the resolutions of the Loskop Public Sector Unions Summit through resuscitating the transformation machinery. All departments will resuscitate Departmental Transformation Structures as an integral part of the institutional arrangement for change by September this year.

We will in partnership with DPSA and Africa International Advisors vigorously coordinate the roll out of the KHA EDU training programme, which seeks to equip senior managers with skills to institutionalize Batho Pele within their respective service delivery environment.

In May this year we will also finalise and present the Provincial Gender Policy to the Executive Council. This will form a basis for uniform operations to all departments and will enable this office to monitor the implementation thereof.

The plight of children will also remain foremost on our agenda and in the next financial year we will continue to host workshops on the rights of the children throughout the Province in order to achieve integration on issues affecting children.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

As our province and country once again gear up for local government elections, we must ensure that the people exercise their right and duty to choose their representatives in this sphere of government, in the same way that they freely chose their provincial and national representatives last year.

These elections are significant because, apart from further deepening democracy, they will be able to truly transform the conditions of the people on the ground.

As Government we will ensure that municipalities are fully capacitated to fully carry out the important task of improving the lives of the people.

In this regard, we will ensure that all Departments lend the necessary support for the success of Project Consolidate.

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND PROTOCOL

The imperatives of globalisation and the effect of the restructuring of international relations, have again emphasised the point that the destiny of our country and our people is closely intertwined with progress, or lack of it, in the region of Southern Africa and the continent as a whole.

That is why we will continue to encourage interaction and cooperation with other countries. We are servicing our agreements with the province of Alberta in Canada, Chongqing Municipality and Sichuan Province in the Peoples Republic of China and Maputo Province in Mozambique and North Rhine Westphalia Province in Germany. In less than a fortnight we shall be leaving these shores headed for Germany and may also be able to further our discussions with Brittany in France.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, I let us continue to build a better world for our children and grandchildren.

The challenge of achieving sustainable human development in Mpumalanga is one that calls upon all of us to contribute to improving the lives of our people.

Let us take to heart the wise words from the Holy Book, Proverbs Chapter 6: verses 10-11 which says: " *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like a an armed man* ". (unquote)

Our province is confident and strong. Our economy is growing steadily and more people are finding jobs.

Over the last decade years, people have come together to overcome great challenges. This year we must move forward with the work that needs to be done. We must grow our economy, we must save our social security, we must protect the people of the province while fostering compassion and understanding. We must make Mpumalanga a better place to live in by improving the material and cultural conditions of our communities.

Let me leave you with the simple words of the unrelenting spirit of a people's poet and intellectual, prof Keorapetse Kgostsietsile, who is in our midst today: " *Let no choleric charlatan tell you that change will not come.*"

Let us move towards opportunities for decent work and sustainable development in a vibrant people centered Mpumalanga.

I thank you.