

**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL
RAMAPHOSA AT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
PROVINCES 'TAKING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE'
PROGRAMME**

**MANGAUNG, FREE STATE
25 AUGUST 2017**

Honourable Chairperson of the NCOP,
Honourable Members,
Fellow South Africans,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, South Africans of all races and from all walks of life entered into a covenant binding them to the vision of a new society anchored on freedom, justice and dignity.

The democratic Constitution that came into effect two decades ago was to be our constant guide to a socially just and fair society.

Our Constitution remains a living document representing the highest aspirations of ordinary South Africans.

It is a product of struggle and sacrifice.

We dare not take it lightly.

To ignore it, is to betray the dream of a better life for all.

From the terrible ruins of race discrimination, from a history of ethnic division and a culture of gender oppression, we pledged in the Constitution to build a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous nation.

We pledged to use the capabilities of all our people and all the resources of our land for the benefit of the people on whose behalf we serve.

United in our diversity, we have sought to build an open, accountable democratic society that adheres to the rule of law while advancing social justice and expanding the frontiers of freedom.

It is this democratic Constitution that gave birth to the National Council of Provinces two decades ago.

It determined that the NCOP should give our people a meaningful say in writing the laws that would change their lives.

It determined that the NCOP should reach out to communities, understand their needs and address their concerns.

By taking Parliament to the people, the NCOP is giving effect to the Constitutional responsibility that it bears.

Honourable Members,

In living the values of our Constitution, we have built enduring institutions to deepen freedom, promote accountability and engender equality.

Our two Houses of Parliament – the National Assembly and the NCOP – are vibrant institutions representing and defending the views and interests of all South Africans.

Inspired by our Constitution, we have crafted for ourselves a vision of an activist people's Parliament that takes seriously its responsibility to improve the quality of life of our people.

By drawing our attention to the injustices of the past, the drafters of Constitution were aware of how governments can go astray.

To prevent the abuse of power and the betrayal of hope, the authors of our Constitution ensured that the human rights of each person must be guaranteed, honoured and protected.

With our long history of exploitation and dehumanisation, we adopted a Constitution that enshrines every individual's right to dignity, freedom and equality.

It is a Constitution that guarantees vulnerable workers their right to fair labour practices and to form and join a trade union.

We are among the few countries in the world that have entrenched rights such as access to water, food, health care and social security.

In producing the ultimate law, we were inspired by a Nelson Mandela who in his inauguration speech said,

*“Let there be justice for all.
Let there be peace for all.
Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.”*

We have been hard at work to realise these rights.

We have responded to our people's needs – for housing, electricity, water, health care, education and social security.

We continue, inspired by our Constitution, to advance the goal of quality universal health care through the implementation of the National Health Insurance.

We continue to promote the right to education to make sure that children of the poor and working class have a better chance than their parents to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation in their families.

However, as the NCOP's visit to this area has confirmed, there is still much more that we need to do to meet people's needs and fulfil our shared Constitutional obligations.

We have heard, for example, of the challenges in our health care system.

We have heard of infrastructure that is poorly maintained, of staff shortages, of problems with the availability of medicine.

Honourable Members,

The Constitution is our nation's instrument to improve the lives of our people.

By recognising the wrongs of the past, it places an obligation on all South Africans to achieve socio-economic transformation.

The Constitution provides a framework to remedy the country's persistent challenge of underdevelopment.

It enjoins all of us to work together to end the legacy of unemployment, inequality, poverty and landlessness.

We were reminded this week of the scale of the challenge with the release by Statistics South Africa of the latest Poverty Trends Report.

This report shows that more than half of South Africans live in poverty.

We must be deeply concerned that children aged 17 and younger are disproportionately affected by poverty.

They are mainly African, female and from our rural areas.

While the report explores poverty in general, it also offers a guide on where we need to focus our efforts when we implement interventions and programmes aimed at alleviating poverty.

It makes clear a very stark truth – that education must be at the centre of the fight against poverty.

It shows that those South Africans with little or no education make up an overwhelming majority of those living below the poverty line.

The report highlights the importance of creating an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, one that is free of intimidation and violence.

While we are now in a better position than we were 10 years ago, when it was estimated that close to two-thirds of South Africans were living below the poverty line, there is a danger that, without decisive action, our progress may start to be reversed.

Behind the poverty statistics, are the individual stories of disillusioned young people who go to bed on an empty stomach.

Behind the numbers are the stories of young women who are forced into transactional sex in order to live for a day.

There are the stories of bright young people who have sought refuge in crime, drugs and alcohol abuse.

There are the stories of the elderly and the infirm who live wretched lives without access to health care or social support.

These are the stories that must remind Honourable Members that our task is enormous, our work is critical and our freedom far from complete.

Where there is despair, it is our responsibility to give people hope.

We need to do so not with fine words or lofty promises.

We need to give people hope through the work that we do in responding to their cries and improving their lives.

The people we represent expect more from us than political bickering and brinkmanship.

They demand that we tell no lies and that we hide no faults.

They demand that we are honest and hardworking.

They expect us to lead the fundamental transformation of our economy.

They expect us to enact legislation and adopt budgets that contribute to economic growth and social change.

When we, as public representatives, scrutinise the programmes and performance of government departments, we need to assess the impact they have on reducing poverty.

Policies that are not working need to be changed.

Public representatives who don't serve the interests of the people should be removed.

We have to act, starting now, to reaffirm their trust in the promise of freedom and democracy.

We have to unite South Africans around a shared vision of a society that is fundamentally different.

Everyone must make a contribution.

Everyone must have a stake.

Honourable Members,

To achieve a just society, South African children should grow up in schools knowing the values of the Constitution.

More than that, they should grow up experiencing the Constitution as an instrument of development and opportunity.

We must not merely respect the Constitution. We must live it.

Only when we live it and invest in its values shall we realise the Constitutional promise of a better life for all.

I thank you.