**IFP MP says even if this govt were to wake up now and do its job, there is no guarantee it will be enough**

Debate on the State of the Nation Address: On the theme: “Following Up on Our Commitments to the People: Making Your Future Work Better”

14 February 2023

Honourable Speaker; Honourable Chairperson of the NCOP; Your Excellency the President; Honourable Members.

Allow me to apologise for my absence on this very important occasion. While I cannot be physically in Cape Town, I know that my contribution to this debate, read by the IFP’s Chief Whip, will nevertheless express the voice of South Africans from all corners of our country. We may not all be at City Hall, but we are all part of this conversation.

Honourable Speaker; when I was a student at the University of Fort Hare, our President of the Student Representatives’ Council, Mr Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, delivered a speech that I have never forgotten.

He quoted the Abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, who declared the urgency of universal emancipation. He said –

“I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? ...Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present… I will not equivocate—I will not excuse.”

Honourable President; after a man has lost his house, there is no glory in arriving with a bucket of water and saying, “Better late than never.” And there is no kindness in telling a grieving mother or a victim of gender-based violence that, “We cannot undo the mistakes of the past.”

There is such a thing as too little, too late. Even if this Government were to wake up now and do its job, there is no guarantee it will be enough to claw our country back from disaster.

Just as the calamity of our past demanded a severe, unequivocal and urgent response, so too does the calamity of the present. Let us not delude ourselves that South Africa can survive a Government that has made promises, reneged on promises, made plans, gone back on plans, changed direction, moved backwards and stood still – all while our country is burning.

In paying tribute to the Honourable Dr Frene Ginwala last week, we remembered the first years of our democratic Parliament and the Constitutional Assembly in which we hammered out the blueprint for the country we sought. Having led the Constitutional Assembly, you will remember, Honourable President, becoming exasperated with your Party and telling them: “At least the IFP knows what it wants!”

Right at the foundations of our democracy, the IFP produced a detailed analysis of what was needed, evaluating all the alternatives, pointing to the right path and explaining why it was the best course of action. Had our Government been as single-minded, committed and competent as the IFP over the past 29 years, I have no doubt the lights would be on.

Your Excellency, you have told us that South Africa is defined by hope and resilience. But if you ask anyone on the street what defines us, they would say loadshedding, unemployment and crime. You are right that we are not a people easily resigned to our fate. But there is a warning in that. How long will it be before you have a revolution on your hands? And believe me, it will not be a silent revolution.

We were all disgusted by the display of hooliganism on Thursday night. The Honourable Speaker was visibly shaken by the storming of the stage by those who have no interest in “working together” or serving the country. The problem is that they feed the frustration of angry people, and their stunts must become increasingly violent to maintain the limelight.

Just last week, their threats and insults and disruptive behaviour evolved into falsely implicating the Minister of Police in a fictional assassination plot. Our people have tired of the rabblerousers, for they have no solutions to offer. They may be a bit of comic relief from time to time, but there are not someone you want at the helm.

When it comes down to it, what South Africans want is solutions. We want honesty. We want fairness, and justice, and to know that our Government is capable and willing to do its job.

It is thus worrying to hear you say, Honourable President, that you have discovered a lack of technical skills and management skills across Government. We have been warning for years that cadre deployment, at the cost of skills employment, would have its effect. You now talk about rebuilding skills that have been lost over time. This did not happen by chance. Skills were pushed out in favour of giving jobs to pals. Can we really believe that that gravy train will stop?

Corruption has become so embedded in the culture of the civil service that will take much more than words to change it. We have had to spend over a billion Rand on an inquiry into State capture. We all saw the abuse of public funds that emerged under the last National State of Disaster. We are not talking about one or two bad apples. There is a pervasive rot that needs to be dealt with.

This is why our citizens no longer hear the echoes of Nelson Mandela when you say let us “work together”. These words have become meaningless. There are communities that have given up on Government ever coming to do the work, and are doing it themselves. They scrape together money to fix potholes. They come together to dig trenches and pay for the installation of pipes to get water. But even then they are told that the pump is missing screws or the water tanker has broken down or some other excuse why Government cannot join this effort to “work together”.

The appointing of a Minister of Electricity in the Presidency is another way of saying that our Minister of Public Enterprises and our Minister of Minerals and Energy have failed. This bloating of bureaucracy is not a solution. As the IFP’s President so aptly asked, why not have a Minister of Potholes in the Presidency, and a special Minister of Education, and a special Minister of Inequality?

What we need is people with the requisite skills, unbeholden to political masters, who reap no side benefits, and who genuinely seek what is best for South Africa. In the absence of this, and in the absence of clear-cut strategies, with firm timelines and deliverables for investors, business and consumers, our fragile economy may well break.

We do have experts and brilliant minds in South Africa. Why are we not listening to them?

We also need to look ahead and train the next generation of skilled experts. You will remember that during our liberation struggle, when all across South Africa schools were being burned down and classrooms abandoned under the banner “Liberation First, Education Later”, Inkatha declared ‘Education For Liberation”. In KwaZulu we invested heavily in quality education for the oppressed, providing the tools to shape the future and preparing the next generation to competently engage with a changed world.

There is something very wrong when we talk about an 80% matric pass rate, when at the same time 80% of Grade 4 learners are unable to read for meaning. What happened in between was not a miraculous intervention, but an excessively high rate of dropouts. And what happens to that generation? How do they find jobs and survive and make their contribution to our country?

Yes, Honourable President, the main issue is electricity. But just because that is the crisis of the day does not mean that every other crisis can be placed on hold. There are communities that have not had water for months and even years. There are people losing their homes and businesses to our struggling economy. There are, as you say, people who call 10111 when their lives are in imminent danger, and no one answers the phone.

Last year I questioned the suspension of the Presidential Employment Stimulus vouchers to subsistence farmers because of poor implementation. In October last year, the Presidency announced that 142 004 vouchers had been issued. Some four months later, the figure has decreased to 140 000. Yet Government promises to provide 250 000 more this year.

It is very difficult to believe the new promises being made when old promises remain unfulfilled.

Honourable President, in his first State of the Nation Address to a democratic South Africa, President Nelson Mandela said –

“The government I have the honour to lead… is inspired by the single vision of creating a people-centred society… to the pursuit of the goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear.”

Almost three decades later, that vision has disappeared. If the promise of South Africa is truly still alive, it is thanks to the resilience of our people. But how far is this Government willing to test our resilience? They are playing a dangerous game.

I thank you.