**Budget Vote 1: The Presidency**

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Your Excellency the President; Honourable Speaker; Honourable Members –

Every year, in the absence of details of this Budget, very little is said about the Budget itself. Instead, this Debate becomes a platform to denounce the President and his Party for every failure, excess and scandal that has destroyed the credibility of the ruling Party and decimated public trust.

I have tried, over the years, to speak to the actual Budget, pointing out the absence of information on the Presidency’s audited performance history; the massive chunk consumed by salaries just to maintain this bloated machinery; the skyrocketing expenditure on travel and consultants; the duplication of reporting lines and the overlapping of roles.

I have done this because that is our duty as public representatives.

We are now faced with the biggest Presidency our country has ever seen. Unlike other Departments, over which Parliament is actually able to exercise oversight, the Presidency has four Ministers, four Deputy Ministers, a Deputy President, and the President himself.

Yet a burgeoning Presidency has not translated into solutions. The problems persist, and are growing.

We therefore thank the IFP’s Chief Whip for his intensive efforts in the Rules Committee, which have finally seen the acceptance that Parliament should strengthen its oversight over the Presidency.

It is the first step on a road we should have walked years ago. And there may still be a long journey ahead. But hopefully, in the end, we will see a time when this Budget goes through the same process that every budget is subjected to; where the accounting officer answers all our questions in committee before we are asked to declare in the House that this Budget is justified.

When that happens, the IFP will revert to speaking to the Budget in this Debate. For now, we must consider the perspective of ordinary South Africans who, like us, have not had the opportunity to ask questions and get answers.

For our people, the figures that cause the greatest anxiety are not the figures in this Budget, but the figures that translate into immediate crisis for households and families across our country.

Figures like inflation. Like the cost of electricity. Like the cost of food. The cost of transport, of healthcare, of education. The cost of doing business. And the terrible cost of pervasive corruption.

We all shook our heads in disbelief when the former President insisted that there was “a good story to tell”. The fact of crisis on every front was blatantly obvious. It was a welcome relief when his successor spoke so candidly of the problems we face. But we needed more than an admission of crisis. South Africa needed solutions.

Without solutions, our economy continued to plummet. The Rand has depreciated more in the five years of this Presidency than it did in the “nine wasted years”. Since the ANC took power, South Africa’s currency has become five times weaker. And the decline is accelerating.

In the five years of this Presidency, unemployment has increased by 6%. We have almost two million more unemployed South Africans now than we did at the start of this Presidency. Youth unemployment has increased by over 8%.

While other emerging markets have managed to reduce inequality, South Africa now has the highest level of inequality in the world. The gap between rich and poor is a chasm. As one activist pointed out, in South Africa, one CEO earns as much as 461 Black women. More than half our people live in poverty.

It’s cheaper to buy petrol in any of our BRICS partner countries than it is here. In fact, petrol costs half the price in Russia than is does here.

In the five years of this Presidency, murder has increased, rape has increased – assault, robbery, hijacking, burglary, theft, illegal possession of firearms – all have increased. Kidnapping has increased by more than 58%.

These are just the figures. They speak for themselves.

February saw us hit 100 consecutive days of loadshedding. Yet, for two months, the Presidency’s new Minister of Electricity had no defined responsibilities.

While GDP flounders at point two percent growth, expenditure in the Presidency is set to increase by 2.9% each year. That figure speaks of a leadership grossly out of touch with reality.

The IFP will support this Budget, but we will not stop holding the Presidency to account.