

**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY, MS
KHUMBUDZO NTSHAVHENI (MP), ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE
GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM (GCIS)
2024/25 BUDGET VOTE**

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CAPE TOWN

FRIDAY 12 JULY 2024

Honourable House Chairperson

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies, Honourable Khusela Sangoni

Deputy Ministers in The Presidency, Ms Nonceba Mhlauli and Mr Kenny Morolong
Members of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies;
Chairpersons of the Boards of MDDA and BrandSA

Management of the GCIS, MDDA and BrandSA

Honourable House Chairperson

Our recent general election and the build-up to the establishment of a Government of the 7th administration somewhat obscured a significant date in the history of our country: 12 June 1964 – 60 years and one month from where we are today.

This was the day Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and seven Rivonia Trialists were sentenced to life in prison by Judge Quartus de Wet, who said the only leniency he could extend to the prisoners was to impose imprisonment for life instead of the death penalty. Madiba recalled this moment in the following way - “We looked at each other and smiled. There had been a great collective gasp in the courtroom when De Wet announced that he was not sentencing us to death.”

House Chairperson

As we observe Nelson Mandela Month and six days from now Nelson Mandela International Day, we can, despite all the challenges we face, smile at one another

as South Africans to celebrate the freedom we earned through the sacrifice of Nelson Mandela, his comrades and millions of South Africans who resisted apartheid. These are smiles of appreciation at the fortitude of our nation and our ability to reach out to one another to heal the divisions of our past.

In 2024, as we mark 30 years of freedom, democracy and development and our reintegration into the global community of nations, we are continuing the task of healing the divisions of our past and overcoming the challenges of our present.

Leading the nation in this effort is our government which derives its mandate from the Constitution and frames its priorities in the focal areas of transformation demanded from all political parties who form this administration and parliament.

This historic mandate is not confined to political parties represented in this parliament, but this is a national effort in which all South Africans must participate, as each of us act to create the South Africa in which we wish to live, raise our children and exercise our economic skills following the 2024 election.

This mandate must build on the great strides we have made since 1994 are reflected in Census 2022, which paints a picture of a society on the move, and which reflects improvements across most indicators. The findings of the Census 2022 also conclusively demonstrated that our development is not by chance, but rather by design from government programmes since 1994.

Today millions of households have access to housing, water, sanitation and electricity when compared to 1994. Our policies have facilitated the greater economic transformation and the empowerment of previously disadvantaged individuals. We have introduced laws and policies on worker rights, employment equity and broad-based black empowerment. There has been strong investment in infrastructure, public employment programmes and achieving higher levels of economic growth. This is a journey that has had and will have many facets into the future.

Honourable members

I wonder how many of us have spotted the Democracy Bus on our streets.

To draw South Africans from across the country into our celebrations, the South African Road Agency in partnership with government has launched the Democracy Bus that will travel to different parts of our amazing country – from our nation’s towering cities to deep rural communities.

Government calls on all South Africans to “**Get On The Bus**” so that they can see and experience the changes we have gone through, as well re-live the many pivotal moments in our democratic journey.

As the bus travels on our roads across all provinces to 30 locations in various parts of our country, citizens will have an opportunity to be part of our ‘**Spot the Bus: Get on the Bus**’ campaign. Citizens can keep a look out for information on the bus’s journey through a digital map that will be published on various social media platforms. The bus’ journey is also a celebration of the achievements of this country that is ranked 11th globally for the extent of our road network and 19th globally for the extent of the paved and tarred road network. This celebration of our world standard road network also acknowledges work that still needs to be done to ensure that all South Africans have access to passable roads and that no community is separated by a river or stream without a bridge.

The Bus is also expected to stop at GCIS Thusong Service centres, which are earmarked as key activation sites. It will also stop at venues for community meetings, Izimbizo and national events, as well as dams, police stations, schools, clinics and hospitals built over the years.

House Chairperson,

I deliver the Budget Vote of the Government Communication and Information System for the 2024/25 financial year, in the full realisation that the task before us is a mammoth one. In the coming period, the GCIS will have to be at the forefront of

engaging citizens on the work of the Government, with an emphasis on mobilising all of society to be part of the unity, change and progress in our country. This moment in our history is one for all South Africans to make their voices heard and their actions seen and felt across society.

GCIS has put forward bold and decisive plans to use the strong communication system it has developed over the years to ensure that South Africans remain abreast of key developments that take place within the country. At its core, the GCIS is responsible for providing strategic leadership and coordinating a government communication system that ensures that the public is informed and have access to information on government programmes and policies that benefit them.

The department will therefore use communication to help citizens across the length and breadth of our nation to participate in and enjoy the benefits of our hard-won democracy. It will share critical information on government services and programmes as well as create opportunities to open the economy to more South Africans.

The government-wide communication system is also tasked with rebuilding trust between citizens and the government the nation has put in place and to motivate communities to replace cynicism, suspicion and despondency with active citizenship, social involvement and confidence in our future.

In the 2024/25 financial year, the Government Communication and Information System will dedicate its expertise and resources to supporting the work of the Government of National Unity, so that we can provide South Africans and our partners with information that can help us to move the country forward. Our first task, as the country navigates the uncharted waters of the GNU, is to educate citizens about the establishment of the Government of National Unity which in its current form is unprecedented in the history of our democracy.

As part of the new administration and with an equally inclusive cohort of communications professionals, GCIS will spearhead a well-functioning government communication system that prioritises informed and empowered citizens.

We will work to ensure improved governance and service excellence, while also continuing the work of ensuring a transformed mainstream print and digital media, advertising and community media landscape.

Honourable members,

Over the past period, the GCIS has worked hard to improve relations with the media, and this has been demonstrated by increased attendance at media briefings facilitated by the GCIS, regular engagements with senior journalists and editors and media webinars with the National Press Club on dominant issues in the communication environment.

In the same period, the GCIS hosted and facilitated a series of continental media platforms recognising the Chairship of the African Union by the President of South Africa in 2020/ 2021.

In our recent past, GCIS initiated priority communication campaigns on the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), and anti-corruption. The department also allocated significant resources to coordinate and support communication during the flooding in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and North-West.

Honourable members,

The work of GCIS has many facets and this includes monitoring the implementation of the Cabinet approved Government Communication Policy through the Government Communication Excellence Tool (G-CET). Strengthening the coordination and monitoring of the government-wide communication system is a key feature in ensuring coherence of messaging and sustained information sharing across the priorities of the Government.

Along with its monitoring and evaluation work, the GCIS will also continue to conduct research to assess the pulse of the nation to provide strategic leadership and support in Government communication. This is done through independent

quantitative and qualitative research to assess the communication environment for government communication and public perceptions on government performance in key priority areas.

House Chairperson

South Africa is confronted with misinformation, malinformation and disinformation continue to be a threat as we execute our mandate. This is also a global challenge especially with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence. We have and continue to work with various stakeholders to mitigate this threat, especially with the communication moving more to social media platforms. Digital media, which is proven to have growing penetration, is expanding at an astounding rate and has become an integral part of our daily lives. It continues to shape the way we connect, communicate and consume information. Therefore, work is underway to increase the reach of all GCIS social media accounts as well as the websites such as www.gcis.gov.za and www.gov.za. This will help to ensure that events on government programmes are live streamed, giving citizens more options for accessing government information.

GCIS will also continue to roll out and support tried and trusted strategies such as Imbizo, direct community engagements and activations and the use of Thusong Centres to ensure that nobody is left behind.

One of the GCIS programmes this year will be to communicate interventions that will improve economic growth as well as communicating economic opportunities available to South Africans. The pillars of the communication programme will include economic reforms and unblocking the challenges facing the economy; employment programmes especially for the youth; resolving the energy challenge; and showcasing catalytic infrastructure projects.

Another priority is the fight against crime and to this end, GCIS is implementing an Integrated Crime Management Campaign which will target the areas of organized and violent crime; illegal mining; cable theft and vandalism of essential infrastructure,

along with the scourge of violence against women, children and vulnerable members of society.

To strengthen Stakeholder partnerships, the GCIS has established a Directorate of Stakeholder Management and Special Projects to marshal all stakeholders in a common front against our social issues. We learnt during COVID-19, the vaccination campaigns and in the implementation of the Energy Action Plan that partnerships are effective in bringing about the social change. The unit will build and maintain effective relations with key stakeholders such as umbrella bodies of faith, non-governmental, civil society, labour, business and sectoral formations of youth, women, children and people with disabilities. It will include strategic communication partnerships that will improve the reach and impact of government communication.

Honourable members

In this period the task of uniting South Africans, ensuring greater social cohesion and striving for inclusive nation building anchored on a central idea, will also take front and center in the work of Brand South Africa and we ensure that the brand of South Africa takes prominence in the international arena.

We are re-imagining The Play Your Part campaign which is a nationwide initiative created to inspire, empower and celebrate active citizenship in South Africa. It aims to lift the spirit of our nation by inspiring all South Africans to contribute to positive change, become involved and start doing. It calls on South Africans to use some of their time, money, skills or goods to contribute to a better future for all. This initiative calls on citizens to be the change we want and to use the power within our hands to make a change.

Another entity of the GCIS is the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) which last financial year celebrated 20 years of its existence. The MDDA has made significant strides in developing the community media sector to reflect the needs and aspirations of all South Africans. In its duty of providing funding and other support for marginalised groups to enable them to start and sustain their own community media projects, it has supported over 586 community and small commercial media projects over the years despite its meagre budget. These include 321 community radio and

community television stations, along with 185 community print projects such as community newspapers, magazines and small commercial print, as well as digital platforms.

The work of the MDDA is important because community media serves to connect people with shared interests and concerns. It amplifies the unique stories and experiences within a community and promoting understanding among its members. In essence, community media acts as a catalyst for social cohesion, empowering individuals to actively engage in dialogue, bridge cultural gaps and collectively address challenges for greater good of society. In the previous financial year and the beginning of this year, we crisscrossed the country opening the state-of-the-art studios and listening to the stories of resilience in how some of these community radios were established and survived over the years, inspired us to do more. With the help of the MDDA, communities radio stations have built functional studios with state-of-the-art broadcast equipment and managed to remain on air, many of them in remote locations. The media projects have also managed to set up news departments producing daily news bulletins reporting on issues of significance for the benefit their communities. The legacy of the MDDA is seen and felt in the vibrant community radio, tv and print sector, which truly reflects a plurality of voices, and opinions.

Honourable Chairperson,

On the financial allocations, the team of GCIS is determined to make prudent use of the financial resources South Africans have entrusted to us. We are committed to harness the department's limited resources in an efficient manner so that we get the most value for money

The budget allocation to GCIS over the next three years of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework amounts to R2,312 billion which is spread as follows:

- 2024/25: R740, 178 million
- 2025/26: R768, 574 million
- 2026/27: R802, 785 million

The GCIS initial allocation of R782, 847 million for the 2024/25 financial year was reduced by R42, 669 million due to government-wide budget reductions implemented by National Treasury.

Over the 2024 MTEF period, the overall budget reductions implemented amount to R141, 563 million and are implemented as follows:

- 2024/25: R42,669 million reduced from Brand SA budget;
- 2025/26: R15,926 million reduced from GCIS budget and R31,929 million reduced from Brand SA budget; and
- 2026/27: R19,880 million reduced from GCIS budget and R31,159 million reduced from Brand SA budget

Our current budget of R740, 178 million for this year is shared across operational costs, capital costs, and transfers & subsidies as follows:

- Our operating budget of R504, 385 million makes up 68% of the budget allocation. It caters for employee compensation of R295, 288 million for 500 permanent positions and goods and services to the value of R209, 097 million.
- Transfers and subsidies of R226, 636 million reflects 31% of the budget allocation. Included in the transfers and subsidies allocation is R38, 568 million allocation for MDDA and R186, 716 million allocation for Brand SA.

Whilst this financial injection from the fiscus is appreciated, it should be highlighted that GCIS of the future requires an extensive capital budget to accelerate digital transformation technologies and ensure GCIS remains relevant, agile and productive by leveraging the best features of the fourth industrial revolution.

Honourable Members

I table this budget for your support,

I wish to thank the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies for their continued support, insight and constructive oversight. In the coming year our partnership will be ever more pressing, and I am sure we will work together to ensure that we provide hope for a better tomorrow for all.

I wish to thank my colleagues at the GCIS and its entities for the dedicated leadership and all staff members, for their continued support and invaluable contributions. In the coming period they will be at the forefront of driving hope and change, and I have no doubt they will continue to rise to the challenge as they have done before.

I thank you.

Debate Closing Remarks by Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni

Honourable House Chairperson

I would like to thank all the political parties for bemoaning the paltry budget of the GCIS whilst given the mammoth task of ensuring coherence of the government messaging in particular during this period of the GNU. I hope that will translate into a commitment with the Department as we engage National Treasury and the Portfolio Committee can engage with both the Finance and Appropriations Committees to ensure, at a minimum, a stop to further budget cuts for the GCIS but most importantly an increase in the Budget of the GCIS.

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee,

We hope to work with your Committee to review the MDDA Amendment Act to align it to key technological developments and good corporate governance practices as well as community media sustainability will also be concluded in this period. In addition, we hope to have the support of the Portfolio Committee with the amendment of the relevant chapters of the Electronic Communications Act to ensure better protection and support for community media to:

- Enable community media to use more advertising to fund their sustainability

- Protect community media from losing their frequencies and bring parity to the Regulations on the renewal of broadcasting licenses, and
- Enable a seamless and less onerous graduation path of community media to small commercial media, and small commercial media to commercial media. The onerous and very expensive requirements imposed on community media go against the intended purpose of seeking media diversification through development and it is time the policy and legislative environment is updated to reflect current realities.

Thank you.