

**THE SPEAKING BY THE HONOURABLE MR K M MMOIEMANG (MP)  
DURING THE DEBATE OF THE PARLIAMENT BUDGET VOTE 2:  
PARLIAMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**MONDAY, 22 JULY 2024,  
NCOP CHAMBER, CAPE TOWN**

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Honourable Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mme Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane,

The Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Les Govender,

Our House Chairpersons, Honourable Bheki Radebe and Honourable Dennis Ryder,

Honourable Special Delegates,

Representatives of the South African Local Government Association,

The Distinguished Representatives of our Institutions of Traditional leadership,

Honourable members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Policy Debate on Parliament Budget Vote signifies an unwavering commitment by Parliament, as the collective representative of the people to one of the fundamental principles of our constitutional democracy, namely: sound financial management, transparency and accountability.

This commitment demonstrates to our people and the international community that, not even Parliament as the central institution of democracy is immune from transparency, accountability and public scrutiny, an ideal that many people have lived, struggled and died for in the history of our country.

As honourable Members may be aware, this budget policy debate takes place shortly after three interrelated critical milestones after the inauguration of the 7<sup>th</sup> Democratic Parliament: the election of the Presiding Officers, the constitution of Parliamentary Committees and election of Committee Chairpersons, and the debate on the President's Opening Address to the 7<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, the fact that it represent the first of its own in the first decade after the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our constitutional democracy and its institutions places a huge responsibility upon our shoulders to remind ourselves of the special place that we occupy in this constitutional democracy, reflect on the route we have traversed since our establishment in 1997 and reassure our people and the world at large about whether we deserve the future or has outlived our relevance as this august House.

2024 marks exactly 70 years since the adoption of the Women's Charter in 1954. This places the importance of the charter at the centre of our transformation agenda, particularly as the seventh dispensation commences its work.

As the NCOP, we have recognised that gender mainstreaming is one of the key strategies that must use to ensure that our council plays a key role in promoting gender equality in our society. Throughout programmes such as the Three sphere planning mechanism, as an oversight agenda setting mechanism; and the Provincial Women’s Charter Report Back Session, we ensure that our Council plays a strategic and fundamental role in the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of government policies and that our government integrates regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination in our society.

Honourable members will concede that ours is a democratic project that is unfolding within the evolving global context of unprecedented crisis of neoliberal democracy and its institutions, especially parliaments, as the central institution of democracy.

The deepening levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality, that are accompanied by the declining confidence of the people in democracy and its institutions cannot be over-emphasised as concrete manifestations of this crisis. As correctly observed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in their 2006 Guide to Good Practice:

*“The paradox of our times is that we hail the victory of democracy whilst lamenting the fact that in many countries parliament – the central institution of democracy, is facing a crisis of legitimacy. The executive branch dominates the agenda, international cooperation and globalization have led to decision making that lacks democratic*

*control, and the people question whether the current political processes are really able to produce parliaments that represent their interests in all their diversity.”*

The global literature on political science is replete with abiding consensus that this crisis is unprecedented since the 1929-1933 world economic recession and is at the core of the current upsurge of populism and geopolitical tensions and rivalries in the global body politics.

In the evolving South African context, two interrelated critical developments occasioned by this crisis make a compelling case for ongoing strategic reflections on democratic renewal, namely: the shifting context of state-society relations marked by a steady gravitation from partnership and collaboration towards violent protests, which according to one seminal study by a renowned sociologists from the University of Johannesburg, Professor Peter Alexander, has earned South Africa the global ranking as the world capital of violent protests.

As we begin our transformative trajectory in the seventh Parliament, we must recommit a focus on addressing poverty and inequality. We must particularly do so, in line with the theme articulated by the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed articulating: “Combating Poverty and inequality is our hands.” This theme was announced during the UN General Assembly observance of Nelson Mandela International day.

In addition to this important theme, the President has also articulated three strategic priorities, which government will be focusing on over the next five years and these include:

- a. Firstly, to drive Inclusive Growth and Job Creation;
- b. Secondly, to Reduce Poverty and Tackle the High Cost of Living;  
and
- c. Thirdly to build a capable, Ethical and Developmental state.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, as we reposition ourselves as Parliament and the NCOP in particular, we must be steadfast in playing a robust developmental oversight role, by keeping these priorities at the center of our oversight approach, including a targeted focus on the National Development Plan.

### **The Government of National Unity – Change in Continuity**

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, as most political parties have agreed in the last debate on the Opening Address of Parliament by the President, the Government of National Unity opens up new frontiers of possibilities for parliament as a tribune of the people in the battle of ideas for the building of a national democratic society to accelerate transformation, democratic renewal and restore the hope of the people in government.

It is however, our contention as the African National Congress that this will not come by its own, but as an outcome of conscious and deliberate act

of leadership by all political parties. As an act of leadership and transformation, it presupposes that parliamentary oversight cannot continue to be business as usual, but through consensus seeking, and matured political management of cooperation and conflict, the ultimate test of which should be the over-riding interests of our people, united in their diversity.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, we are confident that, this managed efficiently can even transform the public image of parliament from ‘a gallery of howlers for the sake of howling’ into a truly dignified contested terrain of struggle for the building of a national democratic society. As the Secretary General of the African National Congress, comrade Fikile Mbalula have said: “the GNU will in no way seek to erode the independent identity of any political party and its duty to articulate the voices of its constituencies.

We say this not out of clamor to sound politically relevant, but out of conscious recognition of the persistence of multiple and competing identities and interests of our people as created by the centuries of apartheid colonial legacy. These are the people that every political party seeks to represent in this august House.

It is also our belief that Parliament has a critical role to play to make this GNU to work and succeed in the interests of our people. Allow me to forewarn those who chooses to be fixated in the permanent past of opposing for the sake of opposing that they will suffer the wrath of the masses, come 2026 local government elections and the 2029 national and provincial elections.

We support the GNU not out of desperation and blind neutrality, but believing that, among its foundation is the reaffirmation of the transformative vision of parliament as articulated in the preamble of the Constitution. In their collective desire to break ranks with the centuries of apartheid and colonial rule defined by race, class and gender, our people, united in diversity; have articulated this vision thus:

*“We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to –*

*Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*

*Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;*

*Improve the quality of life of all the citizens and free the potential of each person; and*

*Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.”*

## **Reposition the NCOP as a critical vanguard of the interests of provinces and the will of the people in the provinces**

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, the political context outlined above and the declining capacity of the democratic state, especially the local government in South Africa make a compelling case for any democratic

institution to pause and take stock of role in the consolidation of democratic renewal. For us in this august House, two interrelated fundamental questions come into sharp focus, namely: how do we reposition the NCOP as a critical vanguard of the interests of provinces and the will of the people in the provinces?

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, it is our belief that the response to these two interrelated fundamental questions can only be determined by two critical factors. First, the relevance of the mission of existence of this august House as crafted by the architects of our constitution, and secondly; the extent to which it has succeeded to fulfill this mission.

If we may recall, whilst the decision by the Constitutional Assembly to disestablish the former Senate which was established in terms of the Interim Constitution of 1993 and replace it with the National Council of Provinces was reached by consensus, it was however not arrived at easily. This was especially so in relation to its specific mandate, powers and organizational configuration.

Critical to this was a fear, especially by the African National Congress not to dilute the principle of a single, indivisible, sovereign democratic state where among others, the provinces will compete with the national government for policy space. It is against this background that our constitution does not assign any autonomy or independence to any sphere of government, but define them as distinctive, interrelated and interdependent.



Based on this, Honourable Deputy Chairperson, the NCOP was conceived as an institutional mechanism in the national legislature to integrate the systems of provincial and local government in the national policy architecture. In this system, the constitution enjoins the national and provincial government to support, by legislative and other means, to fulfil its developmental functions.

It, therefore, logically follows from this constitutional imperative as articulated in section 154 of the Constitution that, at the core of any failure and decline of the capacity of local government are two interrelated fundamental possibilities: the failure of the national and provincial government to support the local government on the one hand, and the ineffective oversight of the national executive by the NCOP, on the other hand. There can be no middle road.

The fundamental question as to whether NCOP has evolved and repositioned itself to successfully discharge this critical task has always been a subject of ongoing debate with competing outcomes. In one of the first seminal studies on the appropriate role of this august House, a group of constitutional experts led by Professor Christina Murray counselled that the oversight mandate of the NCOP is fundamentally distinct to that of the National Assembly and the Legislatures and should therefore not duplicate those.

The Independent Panel on the Assessment of Parliament which was commissioned by parliament itself found among other things that, the NCOP continues to be the mirror image of the National Assembly, thus failing to discharge its core differentiated mandate. This observation permeates the findings of various studies by leading academics.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, we high light this not for its own sake, but as part of clarifying the strategic mission and the relevance of this august House in South Africa’s constitutional democracy. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> National General Council of the African National Congress:

*“In celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the NCOP must reposition its role to ensure that it is at the cutting edge of integrated cooperative governance.”*

The successive leadership of this august House over the last 6 terms have always emphasized the strategic imperatives of strategic niche excellence of this august which is mainly about fostering integrated developmental cooperative governance. This strategic niche excellence permeates the strategic architecture, and orders and procedures of the House and its Committees.

Critical among the instruments of oversight are Select Committees’ scrutiny of Departmental Annual Performance Plans and Budget, Outreach oversight visits to critical service delivery sites, plenary sessions and the Questions for Written and Oral Reply to the national executive, including the Presidency.

The three high-level strategic flagship programmes which are held annually: the Taking Parliament to the People, the NCOP Provincial Week Programme and the NCOP Local Government Focus Week serve not only to strengthen the voices of the provinces and local government in the national policy architecture, but most critically, to strengthen people-centered oversight and monitoring.

Through direct interaction with communities and key sector departments at the provincial and local government and physical visits to critical service delivery sites, the NCOP has enhanced its evidence-based oversight thus triggering targeted responses by the executive to the needs of our communities.

Madam Chairperson, it is not an exaggeration to stand here today and proudly proclaim that, the use of these instruments has not only grown in quantity, but both in terms of quality and strategic focus on the core mandate of this House.

**The National Council of Provinces as the champion of integrated developmental cooperative governance and the custodian of intergovernmental relations in our constitutional democracy**

Going into the future, Honourable Deputy Chairperson, among the critical questions that arise is: Are we doing enough to justly proclaim the National Council of Provinces as the champion of integrated developmental cooperative governance and the custodian of intergovernmental relations

in our constitutional democracy? In responding to this fundamental question, Honourable Deputy Chairperson, three interrelated issues require our critical and urgent attention.

First, critical question relates to the institutional support and capacity to fulfil its mandate, and how does it seek to renew and reposition its flagship programmes such as the Taking Parliament to the People, the NCOP Provincial Week Programme and the NCOP Local Government Focus Week Programme in pursuance of the strategic mandate of deepening the integrated cooperative governance.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, talking about this budget policy debate without highlighting the poor administrative and strategic support to Provincial Whips and Senior Party Whips will not only be academic but a great disservice to our people. The Provincial Whips and the Senior Party Whips play a critical role in the political management of this House and its liaison with the Legislatures and other critical stake holders yet our approach to providing necessary support has been ad hoc.

The second critical focus area is the need for strategic reimagination and repositioning of the three flagship programmes: (1) the NCOP Taking Parliament to the People, (2) the NCOP Provincial Week Programme and (3) the NCOP Local Government Focus Week Programme.

As the honourable members will recall, at the core of these programme are three interrelated strategic goals: deepening participatory democracy

and public education, strengthening the interface between the permanent delegates and their provinces to understand the challenges of service delivery and brining local government at the center of policy making in order to ensure accelerated service delivery, development and transformation.

Critical as these flagship programmes are, among the policy failures continue to be lack of institutional mechanism and capacity to measure their impact on our communities on the one hand, and the lack of effective mechanism to follow up and ensure that they do not become talk shops with no impact. For instance, every year we engage on pressing challenges of local government and service delivery, like the poor revenue base of rural municipalities without any significant breakthrough in terms of policy shift of the executive.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, the last issue that cut across the three is a need for a fundamental rethink of a deliberate and conscious institutional approach to ensure meaningful and effective participation of the province in the affairs of the NCOP. Key to this should include how do we create a structured platform for ongoing interface where this House and legislatures engages provide fed back to each other. This can go a long way in ensuring that both the Local government through SALGA and the Provincial legislatures play a critical role in defining and setting the agenda for this House.

## **Parliamentary Diplomacy**

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, Parliament's Strategic Plan places prime importance on increasing its capacity to represent the interests of South Africa in the international arena. It further seeks to promote and facilitate the transformation of undemocratic governance structures and participate in rule-based systems, which seek to democratize multilateral institutions processes.

As we have done in the past, we must continue to focus on building strategic partnerships around mutual interests, while promoting internationalism and solidarity. We must ensure that we place at the centre of our work, the interconnectedness of challenges amongst African countries specifically and developing nations in particular, to find African solutions for African problems. We must therefore place at the core of our work, the importance of Economic Diplomacy, as an important lever to advance inclusive economic growth amongst nations of the global South, while using inter-Parliamentary Diplomacy as a tool to advance engagement and partnership.

Honourable Deputy Chairperson, we must continue to provide leadership on matters that seek to entrench democratic values, social justice, the rule of law and fundamental human rights. Furthermore, gender equality, women development and youth development, are equally important priorities, as we continue to engage on international platforms. On the African Arena and Agenda, we must ensure continued strategic participation in The Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) and The Pan African Parliament (PAP).

We must also deepen participation in Inter-parliamentary multilateral relations processes, which includes the South – South Cooperation and North – South Relations, as manifested by the South African Parliament`s engagements in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Furthermore, in the context of the IPU, we must ensure that we strategically prioritize the importance of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), as a critical instrument of coordination amongst the nations of the global South.

We must also strengthen further engagements on international fora platforms, including our participation in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific - European Union (ACP-EU), as well as parliamentary Bilateral Relations.

As we deepen Parliamentary Diplomacy and Multilateralism in the Seventh Parliament, we must do so, guided by the imperative to advance South Africa`s national interests.

### **In conclusion,**

As we have said before; the ushering in of an inclusive Government of National Unity is nothing else but a reflection of the popular will of the people through the ballot. Central to the abiding message of our people as expressed in the outcomes of these elections is the simple clarion call to the political parties across the political spectrum: *“Work together in our collective interests, united in diversity, nothing less, nothing more”*.

As the African National Congress we reaffirm our resolve to work together with all sectors of society, side by side, particularly in this august house to advance the interests of our provinces and their people.

On behalf the African National Congress I move for the support of this vote.

Thank you!!