

Response to the State of the nation address

UCDP : Hon IC Ditshelelo

Wednesday, 16 February 2011

The president acknowledged the 17 years of South Africa's birth as a non racial, non-sexist, equal and democratic society. However, after 17 years of what should have been freedom, we hold a world record level in inequality. The majority of the formerly oppressed African live in appalling conditions and dire poverty. I ask, what does democracy mean to people living in pinching poverty? How do you translate the celebration of 21 years since Madiba's release to people with no basic services? What meaning does all this carry?

We welcome the progress made in providing our people with basic water supply. 400 000 is a substantial number, however, we look forward to a time when all South Africans can enjoy basic services because this is their right; and we carry the responsibility of ensuring that they enjoy and benefit from these rights, otherwise there is no meaning to the equality clause in our constitution.

We further appreciate the decline in crime statistics especially the 8.6 decline in murder rate. Nonetheless, gender-based violence is still ranking very high in our society; and it was disappointing that the president did not dwell much on this, because this is a scourge that we must all rid in our society, especially rape.

R9 billion towards job creation shows real monetary commitment. It is obvious that the president intended focusing on unemployment in his address, but decency and sustainability of job opportunities created has not been addressed succinctly. Even the 4.5 million jobs that the Expanded Public Works Programme will create, we do not know if they'll be sustainable and decent. In the recent past we lost a million jobs but boast of having created 480 000 non sustainable, non decent jobs and we cannot continue on such a trend.

We also welcome the allocation of R800 million towards communities affected by floods. We hope however, that the Ministers concerned shall ensure that this reaches the intended beneficiaries and is not manipulated along the way as we've often seen.

We agree that unemployment deserves a lot of attention, but so does Education and Crime and we felt the president did not prioritise these enough. Access to education has been steadily improving over the years but we must equally focus on quality. The uncertainty and controversy that seem to always well up around matric results needs attention. Converting loans to bursaries for final year students is a welcome move, but what do we say about financially needy students wanting to enter tertiary education?