STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS

By Honourable

S.H Ntombela

Premier of the Free State

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#BuildingTheFreeStateWeWant

Free State Provincial Government

FREE STATE LEGISLATURE

STAY SAFE
SAVE SOUTH AFRICA

FREE STATE PROVINCE

Honourable Speaker of the Legislature
Honourable Members of the Legislature and the Executive Council
Honourable Members of the NCOP
Judge President and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary
Modulasetulo wa Ntlo ya Marena le Marena kaofela
The Leadership of SALGA and our Municipalities
The Provincial Commissioner of SAPS
The Regional Commissioner of Correctional Services
Leaders of Chapter Nine and Ten Institutions
Leaders of the African National Congress and the Alliance
All our Special Guests
Viewers and Listeners

Honourable Speaker

These are challenging times for us as the country and the province. For almost a year now, we continue to experience the worst impact of COVID-19.

COVID-19 continues to negatively affect the economy, individuals and households. Many people have lost their jobs, some businesses have closed, poverty is increasing, social life has been disrupted and livelihoods are at risk.

Just when we thought we were seeing the end of the pandemic, we were hit by the second wave. The country moved from lockdown Level 1 to Level 3 again. I am happy to say we are back at Level 1. However, the fight against COVID-19 is far from over and the threat remains real. We must never lower our guards.

In balancing lives and livelihoods, we will still do all that we can to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Even in these worst of times, it remains our responsibility to reduce poverty, create employment and ensure businesses prosper.

I want to thank the people of the province for their understanding. We know it is not easy but continue to wear your mask, sanitise and maintain social distance.

With the roll-out of the vaccine, I am hopeful that we are on the road to recovery. We will save more lives. But this road will not be easy and needs all of us.

We do not know when COVID-19 will no longer be with us. We need to be vigilant. It is not over up until it is over. The struggle continues. Aluta continua.

Economic, Investment, Employment and Infrastructure Development

Honourable Speaker

When COVID-19 happened, our economy was strained. Economic growth, unemployment, poverty and inequality were a challenge. Things are no better.

We are hard at work to revive the economy. But the road ahead remains long.

Through our economic reconstruction and recovery interventions, we want to revitalise the economy and bring long-lasting solutions to our challenges.

Small and medium enterprises are the growth drivers of our economy. It is for this reason why we have introduced incentive schemes to support them.

COVID-19 relief funding to the value of **sixty-one million rands** was offered to **six hundred and eighty-one** small and medium businesses, mainly in townships.
Seeing the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, local economic development was our primary focus in the procurement of **Personal Protective Equipment**.

Of the more than **eight hundred and eighty-nine million, nine hundred sixty-nine thousand rands** spent in the procurement of **Personal Protective Equipment, sixty-two** percent of the enterprises that benefitted were black

owned, **22 percent** youth owned, **21 percent** women owned, **1 percent** were owned by military veterans and another **1 percent** by persons with disability.

In these trying times, we will channel our youth in a position where they are able to apply innovative thinking to combat the challenges we face. We need to see more businesses owned by young people providing essential services.

Essential goods should be locally produced and sourced. As government, we will therefore continue to provide support to business owned by our youth.

We increased investment to grow the economy of the province and pave a bright future for our small and medium enterprises to flourish in these times.

Construction of a small and medium enterprise **Business Hub** in Ficksburg is complete. This was handed-over to the municipality last month.

Another **Hub** in Koffiefontein will be completed in the coming financial year.

Seventy-one small and medium businesses are benefiting from the **Contractor Development Programme**. These are granted various road maintenance business opportunities to qualify for a minimum **CIDB Grading Level 4**.

This **Contractor Development Programme** has been allocated **one hundred and ten million rands** for the 2021/22 financial year. The focus of this **Programme** is the development of businesses owned by young people.

We will create a **Truck Ownership Scheme** for **fifty** young people together with the **Transport Education and Training Authority**. These trucks will be sub-contracted to local small and medium enterprises to transport goods.

Small municipalities will be prioritised in the implementation of this **Scheme**.

Honourable Speaker

Manufacturing is the source of economic growth and we want to tap into its potential to grow this sector in the province. We have secured over **one billion rands** investment in the Maluti-a-Phofung **Special Economic Zone**.

Although it is located in Maluti-a-Phofung, the **Special Economic Zone** is for the benefit of the entire province. Its success is the success of the province.

The **Industrial Park Revitalisation Programme** is well on track, too. We are pleased that phase-one of the **Botshabelo Industrial Park** is complete.

Work on phase-two of the **Industrial Park,** which entails the establishment of the **Botshabelo Digital Hub** is ongoing. The **Digital Hub** is meant to provide training to small and medium enterprises focusing on ICT products.

Another exciting investment is the **Botshabelo Smelter.** This project is at an advanced stage of development. It is expected that the **Smelter** will create **one thousand five hundred** employment opportunities when completed.

We will work closely with **Manguang Metropolitan Municipality** in the spirit of intergovernmental relations to ensure the success of this initiative.

Honourable Speaker

Our province is a great example that mining is a sunrise industry in the country.

Six companies are mining industrial minerals in Lejweleputswa. In addition, there are **three** coal mines that are operating in the Sasolburg and Koppies areas. These mines have a potential lifespan of almost **two** decades.

Together with the **Department of Mineral and Resources**, we provide support to sandstone and sand mining enterprises in Qwaqwa, Fouriesburg, Senekal,

Sasolburg and Zastron. Support includes the provision of risk-sharing funding, permits application and skills development assistance to the miners.

We have huge tourism potential and to lessen the impact of COVID-19 on this sector, we facilitated funding for **one hundred and thirty-four** businesses.

Under the difficult economic challenges of COVID-19, innovative ways were implemented to use our resorts and reserves as quarantine sites to save lives.

In increasing our tourism products offering to stimulate economic growth in the province, we are currently engaging investors to develop the tourism potential of the **Thaba Nchu Airfield** and the **Phakisa Raceway** in Welkom**.**

We are working with the **North West Province**, **Fezile Dabi District Municipality** and the **Department of Environmental Affairs, Forestry and Fisheries** to revitalise the **Vredefort Dome** and market it nationally and internationally.

These tourism growth and development opportunities will be given material dimension in the **Tourism Sector Masterplan** currently being finalised.

Honourable Speaker

Our location provides opportunities for agricultural growth. It is therefore not surprising that **14.5 percent** of South Africa's commercial farming activities take place in the province. This is an advantage we need to fully harness.

Under the **Disaster Relief Fund**, we assisted **three hundred and eighty-nine** farmers to the value of **seventeen million, two hundred fifty thousand rands.**

The intense veldfires in 2020 caused serious damage on farms in particularly Lejweleputswa. Over **one hundred** farms covering **one hundred thousand** hectares of land mass and affecting **fifty-three** farmers were burnt down.

As if this was not enough, farms were flooded causing another massive damage on farm infrastructure such as silos, houses, workshops, crops and vehicles.

Besides causing harm to agricultural production, these disasters affected livelihoods of farmers, farm workers and farm dwellers alike. We have since declared both disasters in terms of the **Disaster Management Act 57 of 2000**.

As I previously pledged that we will use agriculture as a lever for youth employment and creation of economic opportunities, **seven** youth entrepreneurs are benefiting from the **Goats Farming Project** in Tweeling.

A goat house has been constructed and training offered, and beneficiaries have been supported with **two hundred and sixty-one** goats.

Another development is the **Chicky Piggy**, which has been constructed and is operational in Xhariep. This piggery has a bio security facility, office block, laundry, water establishment and reservoir, a tractor and splitter tanker.

Agri-hubs that were established in Thaba Nchu, Springfontein, Wesselsbron and Parys are now implementing the **Grain Value Chain Programme.**

Aspects of this **Programme** include provision of storage and milling facilities to support **Agri-parks** through the **Farmer Support Production Units** in Makholokoeng, Thaba Nchu, Odendaalsrus, Kroonstad and Zastron.

The **Free State Poultry Hub Investment Plan** has been developed. Poultry initiatives are being implemented around Virginia, Parys, Frankfort and Reitz.

We continue to support our subsistence farmers with production inputs such as vegetable seeds, fertilizers and garden tools. Our smallholder farmers must graduate to the commercial level and will be supported with production inputs.

Honourable Speaker

Even when COVID-19 seems to frustrate our plans to create jobs, we created **fifty-two thousand, two hundred and thirty-three Expanded Public Works Programme** work opportunities throughout the province.

From this total number of job opportunities, **69 percent** of women, **48 percent** of youth and **0.72 percent** of persons with disabilities benefitted.

We are looking forward to create **fifty-six thousand Expanded Public Works Programme** job opportunities in the coming financial year. This should start immediately and not later than June.

We will continue with **Expanded Public Works Programme** until the economy yields permanent jobs.

We completed some of the following projects in the current financial year:

- **Odendaalsrus Township Revitalisation Programme**
- **Steynsrus Township Revitalisation Programme**
- **Botshabelo Substance Abuse Dependency Treatment Centre**

The following projects will be completed by 31 March 2021:

- Upgrading of the **Old Eureka Hostel** in Thaba Nchu
- Upgrading of **Charles Mopedi Stadium Parking** in Phuthaditjhaba
- **Botshabelo Township Revitalisation Programme**

The following projects are work in progress:

- **New Riebeeckstad (Thandanani) Clinic** in Welkom
- **New Rheederspark Clinic** in Welkom
- **Charles Mopeli Stadium Phase 1** in Phuthaditjhaba

Charles Mopedi Stadium remains the property of Maluti-a-Phofung and we will work together with the local municipality to successfully complete this project.

In all these projects, government is committed to ensure that local contractors benefit on the **30 percent** set aside.

Honourable Speaker

We have commenced with our programme to distribute land to our people. We have **four thousand, eight hundred and seventy-two** land parcels valued at over **eleven billion rands**.

Of these total number of pieces of land, **two thousand, six hundred and twenty-six** have been earmarked to be transferred to the rightful beneficiaries.

We have completed an audit of farms in the province with the view of making these available to our people, mainly the youth and woman. **Ninety-five** farms that include resorts and nature conservation areas have been identified.

Two lease agreements are being concluded with Mr. Simon Sondezi and Mr. Elias Nhlapo for **Waterval Farms** in Thabo Mofutsanyana. We will determine the possible nature of farming operations on the other remaining farms.

Transformation of the property industry remains our priority too. Of the **seventy-three** office lease contracts, **thirty-nine** contracts are held by previously disadvantaged individuals. This is **53 percent** of the total office lease contracts.

We have completed the construction of the **Botshabelo Transport Route** and **Cornelia Access Road**. By the end of this financial year, these major projects worth **hundred and sixty-six million rands** should have been completed.

- **Deneysville - Heilbron Road**

- **Jim Fouché - Deneysville Road**
- **Hoopstad - Bloemhof Road**
- **Bothaville - Viljoenskroon Road**

However, we are aware of some of the challenges encountered in the completion of the above projects.

In the coming 2021/22 financial year, we will complete the following projects:

- **Vredefort - Viljoenskroon**
- **Wesselsbron - Hoopstad**
- **Sasolburg - Heilbron**
- **Kroonstad - Steynsrus**
- **Ventersburg - Senekal**
- **Bloemfontein - Dewetsdorp - Wepener**
- **Reitz - Tweeling**
- **Tweeling - Frankfort**
- **Schonkenville - Koppies**

Due to COVID-19, we could not continue with some of the projects. We have reprioritised some of the following projects, which remains a serious challenge:

- **Tweespruit - Hobhouse**
- **Koffiefontein - Luckhof - Havenga Bridge**

As part of the **Township Revitalization Initiative**, we implemented **nine** projects to upgrade township access roads. These projects worth **sixty-three million rands** will continue in this financial year. These are:

- **Memel Access Route**
- **Arlington Access Route**
- **Warden Access Route**
- **Clocolan Access Route**

- **Tweeling Access Route**
- **Edenville Access Route**
- **Oppermans Access Route**
- **Springfontein Access Route**
- **Bultfontein Access Route**

In addition to these roads, the following **three** new projects will be initiated:

- **Qwa Qwa Access Roads**
- **Mangaung Access Roads**
- **Xhariep Access Roads**

Using the **Presidential Stimulus Package** valued at **seventy-four million rands,** we intend to create employment opportunities through the **Contractor Development Programme** in Thabo Mofutsanyana.

Contractors, sub-contractors and workers working on this **Contractor Development Programme** will strictly be locals residing in that area.

Operations in the traffic and licensing centres have been a challenge due to COVID-19. As we now move to alert Level 1, we expect the services to return to normal and improve on the backlog.

We are going to do more. Doing more will require us to do things differently. The same approach to the same problems will not work anymore.

Come rain or shine, we are **#Building the Free State We Want.**

Honourable Speaker

I have created a **Task Team** to drive strategic infrastructure projects. The **Task Team** will play a central coordinating function in the identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategic infrastructure projects.

The **Task Team** is led by the Director-General and will work closely with **Infrastructure South Africa** led by Dr. Kgosientso Ramokgopa.

As part of the **Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan** unveiled by President Ramaphosa, we will work together with **Infrastructure South Africa** to implement the following infrastructure projects in the province:

- **Information, Communication and Technology Infrastructure**

  Our province will benefit from phase-two of **SA Connect**, which is aimed at connecting all public buildings, schools, clinics and police stations to free, quality and reliable internet access. The project is funded through the **Infrastructure Fund** and will be implemented in the coming financial year.

- **Human Settlements Infrastructure**

  Vista Park II and III is part of the human settlements portfolio of gazetted projects. The value of the project is about **six billion rands** and it is projected to create **twenty thousand, five hundred and ninety-six** jobs.

  This project is expected to create about **ten thousand, five hundred and sixty-three** mixed used housing opportunities in the Bloemfontein.

- **Water Infrastructure**

  The province is prioritizing the provision of water as a key intervention area. **Rustfontein Water Treatment Works** to increase capacity of water supply to Botshabelo, Thaba Nchu, Excelsior and Bloemfontein has been gazetted to be one of the **Strategic Integrated Projects**.

Infrastructure South Africa is assisting **Bloem Water** to advance the development of **Xhariep Pipeline Project**, which is required to augment raw water for Mangaung and adjacent municipalities.

The project involves construction of **one hundred and eighty** kilometres pipeline from the Xhariep Dam on the Orange River to Knellpoort Dam. It is projected to cost **eight billion rands** and create about **three thousand** jobs.

The **Orange Riet Canal** is meant to increase water delivery capacity from **fifteen cubic meter per second** to **twenty-four cubic meter per second**.

The project is valued at **four hundred million** and will unlock almost **two hundred** jobs. **Infrastructure South Africa** is working with the **Orange Riet Water User Association**, **Department of Water and Sanitation** and the **Development Bank of Southern Africa** for project funding preparation.

- **Rural Roads and Rural Bridges Infrastructure**

Our province has been identified to benefit from the rural roads surfacing programme. We are finalising the identification of priority connecting roads including their technical designs to benefit from this programme.

Construction methods used will be labour-intensive and prioritise locals.

We are working with the **Department of Public Works and Infrastructure** and the **Department of Defence** to build bridges. A total of **four hundred** bridges will be built across the country in the next **three** years and our province has been identified as one of the priority areas to benefit.

Honourable Speaker

I want to thank our healthcare workers for the sterling work they are doing. Your love and dedication to the country continue to save lives. You are our heroes.

To all our fallen healthcare workers who have lost their lives to COVID-19, you will always be in our hearts. We pay tribute to your great deeds.

The fight against COVID-19 continues. Defeating the virus is the whole of society's responsibility. We make important decisions and act quickly as we grapple with the pandemic. We learn as we go and there are no easy solutions.

Starting in April 2020, we embarked on an **Immediate Readiness Program,** which included visits to all healthcare facilities as well as private hospitals and clinics. We also ensured that these facilities are COVID-19 ready.

We partnered with the **World Health Organisation**, **Right to Care**, **Red Cross**, **University of the Free State** in expanding our screening efforts.

Identified healthcare facilities for COVID-19 patients have been refurbished and upgraded. Most importantly, we have added **one thousand, five hundred and eighty-eight** permanent beds to increase our COVID-19 response capacity.

As a response to COVID-19, we employed Social Workers, Psychologist, nurses, Medical Officers and cleaners. These appointments have contributed to our ability to respond to the pandemic whilst creating employment opportunities.

We remain grateful to the Republic of Cuba for its continued support in the fight against COVID-19 and providing us with **seventeen** healthcare professionals.

Honourable Speaker

Vaccine is now available and we are moving fast to scale up the roll-out process.

A lot is happening and this put us a step closer to defeating COVID-19. A provincial coordination structure to oversee the roll-out process is now fully functional.

We have adopted a decentralised vaccine roll-out approach. We plan to vaccinate **one million, nine hundred thousand** people over a 12-month period.

Our target is **two thousand and forty-two** vaccinations per day.

As we continue with the roll-out, we have now vaccinated **four thousand, eight hundred and three** healthcare workers at Pelonomi and Universitas hospitals.

This week we are launching **three** additional vaccine sites, Fezi Ngubentombi in Sasolburg, Bongani in Welkom and Rosepark in Bloemfontein.

Your willingness to be vaccinated is a step closer to recovery and getting the country back to normal. **Get vaccinated**!

Honourable Speaker

We continue to be troubled by violence against women, girls and children. This shadow pandemic is shameful. Women are no less human. No society that respects itself treat its women with disrespect. This is a human rights tragedy.

Violence against women needs to stop. We should not only speak about ending gender-based violence, we should end it. We need to act and act now. Human rights and gender equality must be at the heart of our efforts to end this scourge.

We have appointed **Districts Coordinators** to help the fight against gender-based violence in all the districts. The multi-sectoral **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Technical Committee** has also been created.

The **Technical Team** will drive the **Implementation Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide** in accordance with the **National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide 2020/2030**.

We have a safety house and **five** shelters for victims of gender-based violence in the province. To curb this problem, we provided **three thousand, eight hundred and eleven** victims of gender-based violence with psychosocial support and **hundred and sixty-seven** women were admitted in our shelters.

Honourable Speaker

We have also allocated **three million, four hundred and thirteen thousand rands** for the maintenance and improvement of services for women shelters dealing with all kinds of violence against women.

In the coming financial year, **seventeen million, six hundred and fifty-three thousand rands** will be used for prevention of violence against women and children. Payment of **Child and Youth Care Workers** to strengthen prevention and early detection will come from this allocation.

As I committed last year, we are happy to report that the **Charlotte Maxeke Substance Abuse Treatment Dependency Centre** in Botshabelo is operational. The **Centre** has **one hundred and three** permanent staff, which includes Managers, Social Workers and Care Workers.

We continue to build a resilient social safety net to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods. Through social grants, we provide income to the most vulnerable.

By the end of January 2021, **one million, twenty-seven thousand, nine hundred and seventy** people were benefiting from social grants.

The amount of social grants paid in the Free State is over **ten billion rands** per year. Child support grants constitutes **69 percent** of this amount followed by old age grants at **21 percent** and disability grant at **7 percent**.

Honourable Speaker

We welcome the **thirty-eight million, two hundred and eighty-four thousand rands** allocated for ECD workforce and compliance support workers as part of the **Presidential Employment Intervention Initiative**.

Eight thousand, six hundred and thirty-seven additional ECD workers will be employed using this grant.

We will continue with the contracts of **ninety-two** Social Workers who were appointed for COVID-19 intervention.

We are proud to address the problem of former **Masupatsela Youth Pioneers** who have been at Level 2 since 2011. They will be upgraded to Level 3.

Honourable Speaker

Despite the effect of COVID-19, we are again the leading province with **85.1 percent** Grade 12 pass rate in the country. We are holding on to our number one spot and come next year, you will find us here. We are going nowhere.

We want to thank the teachers and learners the sterling work. Your sacrifice during this time of the pandemic is a sign of your love for education. This first position we have achieved is the fruits of your hard work and dedication.

Currently, **eleven** schools are at various stages of construction. **Two** of these schools are in Xhariep, **two** in Mangaung, **two** in Lejweleputswa, **three** in Thabo Mofutsanyana and another **two** in Fezile Dabi.

The following schools are almost complete, with some facilities already partially occupied to address overcrowding:

- **Caleb Motshabi Primary School** in Bloemfontein
- **Ruang Tsebo School** in Clocolan
- **Mooifontein Primary School** in Zastron
- **Rehopotswe Primary School** in Bethlehem

The following new schools will be completed in the coming financial year:

- **Tlholo Primary School** in Botshabelo
- **Malebogo Primary School** in Hertzogville

Opening the doors of learning in our farms is also important. All in all, we have **thirty-nine** farm school hostels where farm learners are accommodated across the province. This is not enough and we are busy expanding this programme.

Work to improve accommodation for special needs and farm school leaners has started in Leboneng Special School Hostel, Breda Primary School and Dr Blok.

Three other hostels were refurbished to ensure proper accommodation for learners. In the coming financial year, we plan to refurbish **twenty-one** hostels.

Of the **thirty** schools built with unsuitable material, **twenty-five** have been reconstructed with appropriate material and **five** are under construction.

We have advertised **five hundred and twenty-seven** posts of educators. This is in addition to **eighty-two** posts advertised in September/October last year.

Ninety-seven office based educators will be appointed to capacitate our districts and provincial office, and provide professional support to schools.

We have decided to create and fill **fifty-two** positions of Social Workers to provide psychosocial support services in our schools in all the districts.

As part of the **Basic Education Employment Initiative** by President Cyril Ramaphosa, **eighteen thousand, four hundred and ten** Education Assistants and General School Assistants have been appointed.

Honourable Speaker

We continue to build houses in our desire to provide safety, security and comfort to all. Brick by brick and with patience, this will become a reality soon.
In this financial year, we have delivered **one thousand, two hundred and three** housing units. However, we can do more. We need to do more.

We will deliver **four thousand, seven hundred and eighty-five** houses in the coming financial year. Of these total housing units, **three thousand, seven hundred and twenty-three** will be new units and **two hundred and fifty** will be for the **Finance Linked Individual Subsidy**.

In this financial year, we have produced **five thousand, nine hundred and forty-seven** serviced sites. In the coming financial year, we intend to deliver **five thousand, six hundred and seventeen** serviced sites.

Four thousand, two hundred and twenty-three sites are for the upgrade of informal settlements and the other are for new greenfields developments.

We are in the processes of providing the necessary basic infrastructure in Dihlabeng‘s Bakenpark Extensions 6 and 7 in Bethlehem.

The number of informal settlements increased from **one hundred and forty-three** to **one hundred and seventy-three**. This is a challenge.

Work to install internal reticulation in **forty-three** informal settlements is in progress. Once this has been completed, **twenty-nine thousand, two hundred and eighty** households will benefit from these developments.

Eight township establishment projects in **six** municipalities have commenced. Most of these will be completed by the end of the financial year.

Honourable Speaker

COVID-19 restrictions have contributed in the reduction of crime. Although there was an increase in incidents of gender-based violence nationally, similar cases reported in the province were low.

Data shows that sexual offence cases in the province fell by **2,2 percent** in the period between October to December 2019 and October to December 2020.

But this is no success. One case of gender-based violence is one too many.

During the **16 Days of Activism on No Violence Against Women and Children**, we participated in the launch of the **Gender-Based Violence Strategy** hosted by the **Independent Police Investigative Directorate**.

We were also part of the **Roundtable Seminar on Gender-Based Violence** hosted by the **Commission for Gender Equality**. Through some of these engagements, we want to ultimately put an end to gender-based violence.

We condemn acts of criminality in our farms. These acts have the potential to divide our society. These should be stopped and offenders be convicted.

We have established a special **Task Team** made up of all concerned to look at all rural safety matters within the context of the **Rural Safety Strategy**.

At the same time, we are implementing a five-year **Intelligent Animal Tracking System** in Thaba Nchu, Botshabelo and border areas to curb livestock theft.

We value our law enforcement officers who day and night continued to put their lives on the line in pursuit of justice. Your commitment to the rule of law is a commitment to the security of our province. In your hands we know we are safe.

At the time of the lockdown, your were out there in our streets. The Provincial Police Secretariat conducted oversight to assess police visibility and business compliance with regulations. We were so impressed. We want to thank you.

I am pleased to announce that in the 2020/2021 festive season, our road accident fatalities fell by **0.9 percent** compared to the 2019/20 festive season.

Honourable Speaker

Like other sectors, the **Sport, Arts and Culture** sector was affected by COVID-19. Many events had to be cancelled. These included **MACUFE**, **Heritage Day**, **Freedom Day**, **O.R Tambo Games** and the annual **Reading Festivals**.

Despite the COVID-19 limitations, we were able to provide relief funds to artists and athletes to address the financial distress that many were facing.

Eight hundred and ninety-six artists benefited from the **five million, two hundred and twenty-eight thousand rands** COVID-19 relief fund.

Two million, five hundred and ninety-five rands was also made available to **one hundred and seventy-one** sport sector beneficiaries.

The creative industry continues to suffer the most during the pandemic. We will make additional funding available to assist our artists and athletes.

For the coming financial year, we will open the Smithfield and Soutpan libraries and complete the construction of Van Stadensrus library. Construction of a recording studio in Kroonstad will also commence soon.

We will unveil the statues of **Winnie Madikizela-Mandela** in Brandfort and **Albertina Sisulu** in Welkom in the coming financial year.

Governance, State Capacity and Institutional Development

Honourable Speaker

The pandemic has not prevented us from fulfilling all this important responsibility of building the capacity of the state. Training sessions for **Recognition of Prior Learning for National Public Administration Certificate** were offered.

Change Management sessions and **sixteen** accredited courses provided through the **Free State Training and Development Institute** were conducted. Training and development opportunities were not only limited to government officials. To achieve and enhance our development prospects, we continue to provide bursaries to many of our youth, nationally and internationally.

We now have **one thousand and twenty-one** students studying various courses nationally and **five hundred and twenty-three** internationally.

Our responsibility to the youth does not only end with the provision of bursaries.

Working with the **Sector Education and Training Authorities**, we are leading the efforts to provide work experiences to youth through graduate internships, learnerships, short skills programmes and work integrated learning methods.

In total, **three thousand and sixty-seven** learners benefitted from different **Skill Development Programmes** at a cost of **one hundred and nine million, seven hundred and eighty-one thousand rands.**

We are also excited with our placement programmes with the private sector. Agri-business and commercial farmers have agreed to support **hundred and twenty** graduates with innovative farming technology initiatives.

Another **hundred and twenty** unemployed graduates were funded by government and placed for work experience in various enterprises.

To fill a gap in the automotive industry and provide **TVET** graduates with training, our **Road Building Equipment** unit is concluding training of **twenty-three** artisans who will subsequently be taken for **Red Seal Certification**.

We will in partnership with the **National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa** implement the digital skills programmes by providing **Basic Digital Literacy Courses, Specialist Technology Training Programme and Digital Transformation Programme** to young people.

Following the successful **4th Industrial Revolution Summit** in 2019, we brought together the private sector, civil society, academics and the public sector in one platform to chart a common vision for a digitized Free State.

As part of the resolutions of the **Summit**, we have established a joined **Task Team,** with the **Central University of Technology** to conduct a baseline study on the use of the **4th Industrial Revolution** technologies in agriculture.

We are rolling out artificial intelligence programme with **Microsoft** and **Gijima.** We have trained **eighteen** young people in artificial intelligence as trainers as part of our **Innovation Hub** activities at the **Central University of Technology**.

We are collaborating with the **Close Loop Network** to roll-out an **online Entrepreneurial Matriculant of the Year Competition** meant to introduce business culture to young people before they complete Grade 12.

Working with **SITA**, we will soon establish the **Free State ICT Security Centre** to protect government information. Through this **Centre,** we will revive the **ICT** sector and create new skills set to propel the Free State into the future.

Honourable Speaker

We are concerned with the state of our local government. Many of our municipalities are facing technical, administrative and financial challenges.

Instances of poor planning, implementation and oversight are all too common.

Again, they have affected effective functioning of municipalities and ability to provide quality services to the people.

As the servants of the people, we take no pride in poor service delivery. People deserve better and it is our responsibility to give them the best they deserve.

We are providing various service delivery, financial, technical and capacity support to municipalities. We will do everything necessary and possible to serve the people with pride, professionalism and dignity they deserve.

Honourable Speaker

Given different challenges that range from maladministration to poor service delivery they face, we have placed Mafube, Metsimaholo and Mangaung municipalities under **Section 139 of the Constitution.**

What is concerning is that the situation in Mafube is yet to improve and we have since appointed a new Administrator to deal with challenges experienced.

Metsimaholo is no different. Service delivery remains a problem with non-appointment of senior managers and less expenditure. We have taken administrative functions of this municipality to improve service delivery.

In Mangaung, there was a cash flow and revenue collection problem. We intervened to implement a **Mandatory Recovery Plan** and there is progress.

We lifted the intervention in Maluti-a-Phofung when signs of progress were visible. Improvements include timeous payment of salaries and third parties, billing and revenue collection.

However, the provision of water remains a challenge and the national and provincial government are working hard with the municipality to deal with this.

Our municipalities continue to provide basic services through the **Municipal Infrastructure Grant** to expand access to services for many of our people.

Over **two hundred and eighty-six million, three hundred eighty-six thousand rands,** out of an allocation of **seven hundred and forty-six million, two hundred fifty-seven thousand rands** of the **Municipal Infrastructure Grant** was spent by the end of December 2020.
We will expand access to water, sanitation, electricity, roads and storm water.

Honourable Speaker

Attacking corruption remains high on our development agenda. We need to be transparent, effective and accountable to create trust in government. This we can achieve only when we are serious about the fight against corruption.

We are cooperating with law enforcement agencies in their investigations. I have instructed MECs to ensure that public servants doing business with the state as reported by the **Public Service Commission** are dealt with accordingly

We welcome the initial report of the **Special Investigation Unit** on COVID-19 related procurement. We remain committed to the investigation processes and look forward to the final report.

No acts of corruption will be tolerated in our municipalities too. A database of fraud and corruption cases reported in municipalities has been created. Some of these cases are already being dealt with by law enforcement agencies.

The pressure on national government to reduce debt and budget deficit will certainly affect us. With what awaits us, we cannot afford any wastage.

Initial budget estimations show that we will lose more than **eleven billion rands** in the next coming three financial years. We will have to do more with less.

This year the audit outcomes of departments show significant improvements. Of the **twelve** departments, **six** received qualified audit opinions with **one** outstanding. We congratulate all those departments that received unqualified audit opinion and the Provincial Treasury for receiving a clean audit.

At municipal level, of the **twenty-three** municipalities, **twelve** received qualified audit opinions with **four** disclaimers and **three** had outstanding financial statements. **Four** municipalities received unqualified audit opinions.
Provincial Treasury will monitor and support provincial departments, entities and municipalities to improve sustainable and accountable fiscal governance.

Support will include the development of funded budgets, which are aligned to performance plans, including audit and risk management plans. We need to establish an **Auditing Task Team** to monitor and assist municipalities.

We will ramp up the implementation of the **District Development Model** as a central organising concept to enhance integrated planning and coordination, and align development efforts between the three spheres of government.

We have developed the **Districts Profiles**, which will inform the content of the **One Plan** for the country. The provincial and national **District Development Model** political champions comprised of MECs, Ministers and Deputy Ministers have been nominated and continue to have engagements with the districts.

Conclusion

Honourable Speaker

We have learned a lot from the unfortunate COVID-19 pandemic. This experience will live with us forever. We need to take what is good and learn from the challenges it imposed on us.

Of all the lessons we have learned, the most important one is never to despair in the face of hardships. There is no doubt that we will rise again. Challenges should only make us stronger. We should be united in our action.

We have seen the worst and emerged victorious. This is no different. The courage of those in the forefront of the fight against the pandemic is humbling. Without all of you and your dedication, we could have seen the worst.

We pay our respect to all those who have lost their lives to COVID-19. May their souls rest in peace.

To date, we have **eighty thousand and sixty-five** confirmed cases of COVID-19, **three thousand two hundred and fifty** deaths and **seventy thousand, three hundred and twenty-eight** recoveries.

I want to take this opportunity to thanks all MEC for their hard work and dedication. We are united by the purpose to serve and this we continue to do. It is a pleasure to work with you.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all public servants for having kept the boat afloat during these difficult times.

My heartfelt thanks to my family for your understanding always. Your continued support is humbling and inspiring. With you by my side, all things are possible.

I thank you