

**BUDGET VOTE 4: GCIS – PARLIAMENTARY SPEECH (10 MINUTES)**  
**Speaker: Khusela Sangoni Diko, MP**

**Madame Speaker,  
Minister and Deputy Minister,  
Honourable Members of this august House,**

**Esteemed and Valued Stakeholders in the ICT Sector and especially want to acknowledge the CFO of Telkom, Ms Nonkululeko Dlamini, who is present in the Chamber with us today comes bearing gifts of more than half a billion rands in dividends due to the South African people**

**Fellow South Africans,**

It was exactly twelve months ago that the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies of the seventh Parliament was constituted. The first order of business of the new Committee was to adopt the 2024/2025 budget vote for Department of Communications and Digital Technologies' (DCDT). With a strong sense of purpose and hope in our hearts, we approved (in a matter of hours if memory serves) a R3.9 billion budget for the Department and its Entities. With great optimism, we believed we were continuing with the vital work of “building a digitally connected and inclusive society”

That budget Minister, was meant to be a springboard—to connect our people, uplift our rural communities, build local innovation, and ignite inclusive digital growth. As we meet here today faced with the same task of approving this years budget, we must ask collectively what did we do with the perfect opportunity bestowed upon us 12 months ago?

One year on, our vision, as a Committee, remains the unchanged: to ensure that every South African—regardless of geography or socioeconomic status—has access to the tools, infrastructure, and opportunities needed to thrive in the digital age.

As a Committee we have remained focused on delivery on our constitutional mandate—lawmaking, executive oversight, and public participation—we’ve made significant progress, just as we have endured significant setbacks. Among the sparks of progress we have witnessed:

- The SABC achieved its first unqualified audit in over a decade.
- SAPO moved closer to exiting business rescue with plans underway to reposition it in the ecommerce space as the Post Office of the Future.

- We travelled to rural areas far and remote and saw households in areas like eMaXesibeni and connected to affordable internet via the SA Connect programme.
- Postbank advanced its compliance with the variation notice of the Reserve Bank, bringing it that much closer to becoming a fully licensed bank.
- The Committee instituted quarterly oversight on the implementation of audit action plans of the Department and Entities, which we now believe are influencing improved governance.
- In an unprecedented 180 days, Parliament finalised the ICASA Council appointments augmenting the skills requirement for a fit for purpose Regulator of the Future
- Working with the Portfolio Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation under the capable leadership of the Chairperson Hon Tsakane Shiviti, we firmly placed the National Satellite Communication programme front and center of government's agenda, with the last report received from the Minister indicating that this strategy was enroute to be adopted by Cabinet

During the course of this year Madame Speaker, we conducted oversight visits from Lusikisiki to Diepsloot to better understand the connectivity challenges our people face.

Through these engagements, we echoed the calls of millions and carried the hopes and frustrations of the people directly to the door of our telecoms companies . We gave voice and urgency to the cries of the people telling Vodacom, MTN, Telkom, Cell C and Rain that the people demand reliable rural connectivity, lower data prices, data that does not expire, inclusive economic participation, and better quality of service.

Despite this advances, it is true though, for every step forward, there have been two steps back.

Honourable Members as we speak to day, key legislation such as the SABC Bill and the amendment Electronic Communications Act have stalled and if this strategic plan we are debating today is anything to by, such legislation is at risk of being abandoned altogether. The gains of transformation are being reversed and our portfolio state owned entities are facing assault on their mandates from the very Department that is meant to protect them. The Department's lacklustre pace in enacting urgent legislative reform has weakened the sector and left the vulnerable defenceless (whether it be women who face Gender Based Violence on online platforms or struggling media entities either losing their advertising revenue to search engine giants or being cannibalised by Over The Top services). The Department's inaction on legislation affects all of them and sends a clear message that they are on their own.

Madame Speaker, we understood twelve months ago as we still do today, that the task to build a truly connected society would be daunting. Leadership instability at the highest level has plagued the Department over many years. Since the dawn of democracy, Communications has had no less than 16

ministers, each one bringing their own vision, more often than not dismantling what came before; very few of them serving long enough to drive sustainable transformation. And the result? A Department without memory in doing. A department without momentum in execution. And a Department without mastery in innovation and resilience.

It is no exaggeration to say, to date the sector remains rudderless and directionless. In search of a sector lodestar, we veer from the Presidential Commission on 4IR's recommendations to the Digital Economy Masterplan, now lately the Digital Transformation Roadmap. We have no single, coherent industry vision, co-created with the sector and driven at the centre. Implementation of what is even there lags, mandates overlap, and resources are squandered.

Madame Speaker, Honourable Members, we are tasked to lead a sector that is the gate to a different world becoming.

A world shaped not by land or minerals, but by code.

A world not ruled by guns or borders, but by networks, algorithms, and data.

A world where progress is measured not by how fast we dig, but by how fast we connect, innovate, and imagine.

And yet—amid this sweeping tide of global digital transformation—South Africa is lagging. Not because we lack talent. Not because we lack will. But because we lack urgency, vision, and a unified direction.

The rest of the globe is not waiting for us

- India has launched its own digital public infrastructure—linking ID, payments, and social services through one seamless ecosystem.
- Rwanda has built drone corridors to deliver medicine to its most remote villages.
- Kenya's Silicon Savannah is creating thousands of jobs through tech hubs and local innovation.

In South Africa, ICT continues to be treated as a footnote—rather than a driver—of economic growth and job creation in the country.

So I say again, as we meet once again today to consider the approval of a significant budget, we are duty bound to ask of ourselves some difficult questions?

- We must ponder whether through this budget, will we be once again funding a series of missed opportunities and unfulfilled promises?
- We must critically engage on whether this Department can truly deliver without a cohesive vision and strategic alignment? Or are we, enabling the Department to remain an albatross around the neck of innovation and progress?

- It is our responsibility to question what cost is of delay of crucial legislative and other reforms required to leapfrog our digital economy
- We must ask the pertinent question. - Can South Africa Cannot Afford to Miss the Digital Future?

It was António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who said:

*“The digital revolution can be a force for good. But it will not happen on its own. We need to steer it with clear strategy, coordination, and courage.”*

The digital economy is undergoing rapid transformation:

- Artificial Intelligence is revolutionising sectors from healthcare to manufacturing.
- 5G and beyond are enabling smart cities and next-gen services.
- Cloud computing and data sovereignty are central to digital competitiveness.
- Cybersecurity threats are intensifying, demanding robust governance.
- Digital public infrastructure is becoming the foundation for inclusive service delivery.

South Africa must respond with urgency and intent.

We are calling on the Minister to set out a clear vision for the industry and mobilise all stakeholders to realise it. We are saying to the Minister pick a side (and I hope it is the right side) and run with it so we know where you stand on important matters such as

- economic transformation in favour of the black majority,
- the nature of effective competition in the sector,
- market consolidation,
- price regulation,
- the formation of a state bank,
- funding of SABC's public mandate,
- meaningfully capacitating the state digital infrastructure company and the enduring and determined call for a wireless open access network,
- national and digital sovereignty.

To this end and following extensive engagements with the Ministry and the Department we reiterate our call that the Department prioritise the following:

### **1. Modernising the Legislative Framework**

Our laws are relics of a bygone era—crafted before artificial intelligence, before cloud computing, before the internet was in every child's hand. We cannot regulate AI, OTT services, or digital platforms with outdated legislation. In the coming few weeks, the Committee will adopt its own legislative agenda to ensure laws support innovation, competition, and investment in emerging technologies. This we do to safeguard integrity of our laws to ensure they are not amended by stealth or policy directives.

### **2. Accelerating Inclusive Economic Transformation**

The digital economy must be a key pillar of inclusive growth. We need targeted investment in digital startups and a thriving startup ecosystem, funding for local innovation hubs, and policies to ensure that our people are not just consumers, but creators of technology.

We echo the vision of leaders like the MTN South Africa CEO: *“We must have a software developer in every home.”*

Universal connectivity must be a priority—through fibre rollout, expanded broadband access, and spectrum policy clarity.

### **3. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure and Sovereignty**

South Africa must control its own digital destiny. That means:

- Investing in a **national communications satellite**.
- Expanding **local data centres and harbours**.
- Ensuring **technology neutrality** while asserting **digital sovereignty**.

We cannot allow multinational platforms to dictate our digital reality. We must be clear on our intentions to provide for our own people and not be seen as an opportunity for racist and predatory elements that want to enter our market.

### **4. Enhancing Cybersecurity and Online Safety**

Cyberbullying, misinformation, and digital exploitation are growing threats. The Department must lead on the implementation of cybersecurity policy, finalise the Audio-Visual White Paper, and regulate new media platforms such as podcasts responsibly.

### **5. Stabilising State-Owned Entities**

Our state-owned entities are fighting each other like siblings in a dysfunctional home. Sentech and the SABC. SAPO and the Post Bank. BBI with Eskom and Transnet. SITA and everyone else. This is at a time when they need to be pulling together to build a digital future. We urge the Minister to resolve the SABC–Sentech impasse and improve financial oversight across the portfolio. We will continue to support and advocate for greater funding towards the portfolio and also urge the Minister that where appropriate, public-private partnerships must be explored without compromising public interest mandates.

### **6. Building a Capable, Ethical State**

We must ensure appointments are merit-based, skills-driven, and aligned to a culture of public service. Corruption and mismanagement can no longer be tolerated.

You will not be able to build an economy of the future with skills of the past. From government employees to each and every single person. We must roll out an extensive digital skills programme and make it meaningful by putting affordable devices in each and every person's hand

## **Budget Overview**

Over the MTEF period, the Department's budget is R7.8 billion—R5.4 billion of which is allocated to transfers:

- R1.8 billion to SAPO for rural postal services,
- R1.6 billion to ICASA,
- R707.4 million to the SABC.

An additional R1 billion goes to compensation of employees, with a growth projection of 5.1% to fill critical vacancies.

This budget must not be business as usual. These entities must become enablers of innovation, inclusion, and resilience.

Minister, as the African National Congress we recommending the approval of this budget. Not with the blind, starry eyed optimism of the new Committee members of yester year but with an appreciation of the task you face, the challenges you have inherited and the inescapable need for all of us – each to his/her own mandate – to work together for the good of our country. It demands that we continually strive to meet each other halfway and where possible lighten the load. The support of the African National Congress however is not a blank cheque and we will never engage in petty politics like us to reject a budget because we are sulking. This is because we believe that instruments such as the budget are vital to deliver qualitative change in the lives of the people for the better. It is irresponsible and frankly reckless to bargain on the back of the people, the poor, in that manner.

So Minister we will follow through on the dearly held wish of the people to not be left behind and our responsibility as their elected representatives to fearlessly hold you accountable. We thank the Minister and the Deputy Minister and appreciate your untiring commitment to constructively engage with the portfolio committee and wish you well as you continue to try steer this ship to the new world of becoming. We commend the Department and the hard working men and women in all our entities to their commitment to eventually getting it right. Your passion, the determination and the resilience have not gone unnoticed. My appreciation also goes to the Committee which never tires and remains relentlessly committed to the course of meaningful connectivity and opportunity .

## **In Conclusion**

Honourable Speaker, the task before us is daunting, but it is also rich with opportunity.

Let us not squander this moment. To use the immortal Latin phrase, Carpe Diem, seize the day

We must grasp it not with our own hands, but with the hands of every South African man, woman and child.

Let us no longer wallow in the cesspools of dithering and indecision.

We must move beyond rhetoric, beyond missed opportunities, and toward a future where *every South African has a stake in the digital economy.*

ENDS