

Speaking Notes for ANC Chief Whip, Cde Mdumiseni Ntuli on the occasion of the debate on vote one

Budget Vote 1 Debate: The Presidency

02 June 2026

Introduction: supporting Budget Vote 1

Madam Speaker,

His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa,

Honourable Members,

Fellow South Africans,

On behalf of the African National Congress, I rise to express our unequivocal support for the adoption of Budget Vote 1: The Presidency.

We do so because this is not an ordinary budget vote. The Presidency is the centre of strategic leadership in the democratic state. It is the institution through which the President, as Head of State and Head of the National Executive, exercises the constitutional responsibility to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution; to promote the unity of the nation; to coordinate the work of the executive; and to ensure that the machinery of government is directed towards the realisation of a better life for all.

When we vote on this budget, therefore, we are not merely approving administrative expenditure. We are resourcing the centre of government to coordinate delivery, enforce accountability, accelerate reform, rebuild state capacity, and give practical expression to the priorities of the Medium-Term Development Plan: inclusive growth and job creation, poverty reduction, a capable state, and a society founded on human dignity, equality and non-racialism.

We debate this vote in a year of historic importance. In 2026, South Africa marks 30 years since the signing of the democratic Constitution. This is not a ceremonial milestone. It is a moment to reflect, renew and recommit ourselves to the unfinished task of social and economic transformation.

The Constitution was born out of bitter struggle. It emerged from the long night of colonial dispossession, land conquest, migrant labour, racist exclusion, pass laws, bannings, massacres, detention without trial and the brutal arrogance of a Parliament that once believed it could turn injustice into law, simply because a white minority commanded the numbers in this House.

That is why our democracy is not a crude parliamentary democracy in which a majority may do as it pleases. Ours is a constitutional democracy. Parliament makes law, but the Constitution is supreme. The executive governs, but only under the authority of the Constitution. The courts interpret and enforce the Constitution, not as enemies of democracy, but as guardians of the compact that the people of South Africa made with one another after generations of division and suffering.

The Preamble to the Constitution describes our supreme law as a bridge from a past of deep division, strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, towards a future founded on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. That bridge was not built so that the poor may admire it from a distance. It was built so that the dispossessed, the unemployed, the landless, women, workers, young people and rural communities may cross into a new society.

It is therefore profoundly mistaken to present the Constitution as an obstacle to transformation. The Constitution is not a brake on transformation; it is the mandate for transformation. It authorizes restitution, redistribution and tenure reform. It protects workers. It requires the state to take reasonable measures to advance access to housing, health care, food, water, social security and education. It permits, and indeed demands, measures to overcome the legacy of unfair discrimination.

The failure to fully use the transformative instruments of the Constitution cannot be blamed on the Constitution itself. To blame the Constitution for unemployment, inequality and poverty is to misdiagnose both the history of apartheid capitalism and the practical weaknesses of implementation. Our task is not to weaken the constitutional order. Our task is to make the Constitution live in the factory, the farm, the township, the rural village, the classroom, the clinic, the police station and the household where dignity is still daily denied.

The ANC does not approach the Constitutional Court as a matter of convenience. We do not celebrate judicial authority only when it flatters us and attack it when it corrects us. A Constitutional Court judgment is not an external assault on the democratic state. It is one of the ways in which the Constitution speaks to all arms of the state.

When the Court pronounces on parliamentary procedure, executive accountability, the processing of legislation or the obligations of public power, it strengthens our democracy. It reminds us that no party, no minister, no official and no institution stands above the Constitution. That is why the ANC, as the liberation movement that fought for this constitutional order, must be first in line to defend judicial independence, legality, accountability and the separation of powers. Of course that does not mean there would be no instances where the movement or even the democratic state would disagree with certain positions adopted by courts.

However, there is no contradiction between revolutionary transformation and constitutional discipline. In fact, without discipline, transformation becomes a slogan. Without accountability, power becomes patronage. Without the rule of law, the poor suffer first and suffer most.

Honourable Members, this budget is also considered at a time when the world is marked by dangerous fragmentation. Wars, unilateralism, protectionism, debt distress, climate shocks, food insecurity, disinformation and narrow nationalism are reshaping global politics. South Africa is not insulated from these storms.

We have seen attempts, particularly from right-wing quarters abroad and their local echo chambers, to distort South Africa's reality, to weaponise our internal challenges, and to punish our country for pursuing an independent foreign policy. This includes hostility towards South Africa's principled stance on the devastation in Gaza and the case we brought before the International Court of Justice regarding what South Africa has characterised as genocidal conduct by the State of Israel.

But South Africa must not be bullied into silence. The ANC-led government has placed our country on the side of international law, human rights, multilateralism and the right of all peoples to self-determination. This is consistent with the best traditions of our movement and with the Constitution's injunction that South Africa should build a united and democratic country able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

The legacy of South Africa's G20 Presidency, under the theme of solidarity, equality and sustainability, must be understood in this context. We used that platform to lift the priorities of Africa and the Global South: fairer trade, debt sustainability, climate justice, development financing, food security, industrialisation and a more equitable world order. This budget ensures that the Presidency can continue to coordinate that global work while strengthening the domestic foundations of our democracy.

Our international role cannot be separated from our African responsibility. South Africa is an economic anchor of Southern Africa. Because of the relative size and sophistication of our economy, our infrastructure, our financial system and our labour market, we are a major receiving country for migrants from the region and the continent. This is not an accident. It is the product of history, geography, unequal regional development and the continued search by millions of African people for work, safety and dignity.

The ANC's position must be clear and principled. We reject xenophobia. We reject vigilantism. We reject the demonisation of African migrants. We also strongly reject the display of arrogance and contempt from some foreign nationals living in our country. No human being should be attacked, humiliated or denied basic dignity because of nationality. We must never confuse criminality with nationality. The criminal conduct of a few must never become the identity of an entire people.

At the same time, Pan-Africanism cannot mean that South Africa alone must carry every social, administrative and security consequence of regional underdevelopment and irregular migration. Neighbourliness is not a one-sided duty. Sister African governments also have responsibilities towards their citizens who live, work and trade in South Africa. They have responsibilities to cooperate on documentation, consular support, law enforcement, voluntary return where appropriate, skills partnerships, reintegration and the conduct of their nationals abroad.

We therefore urge our brothers and sisters on the continent not to be hasty to condemn South Africa as though the actions of a few define the whole nation. Such an approach risks deepening suspicion, fragmenting in the continent and isolating South Africa from the very African solidarity we

all need. Equally, we urge South Africans not to surrender to anger, prejudice or vigilantism. The answer is a capable state, lawful migration management, regional cooperation, decent work, secure communities and the rebuilding of local economies.

We must also speak plainly about the role of sections of the private sector. It is too easy for business to lament instability while avoiding its own responsibility for investment, decent employment and compliance with labour law. There are employers who have exploited the desperation of vulnerable migrants, including undocumented workers, to depress wages, evade benefits, avoid bargaining obligations and weaken the position of South African workers. They then pass the social cost of this conduct to government, municipalities and poor communities.

Mr President, this is unpatriotic. It is also economically reckless. A country cannot build social cohesion when desperate people are set against one another in a race to the bottom. The ANC has always insisted that the dignity of labour is indivisible. A worker is not less worthy because she was born beyond our borders. But neither must migration be abused to undermine South African workers, trade unions, wage standards and lawful employment.

Corporate South Africa must also answer a larger question. At a time when communities are desperate for jobs, industrial renewal and local procurement, non-financial companies have been holding historically high levels of deposits. Liquidity must become factories, machinery, skills, logistics capacity, township enterprise, agro-processing, renewable energy components, rail rolling stock, water infrastructure and export industries. We need a patriotic investment compact that turns balance-sheet strength into productive capacity.

This budget, through the coordinating work of the Presidency, must help convert pledges into projects, projects into production, and production into work. The country does not need another recital of investor confidence while industrial sites remain idle and young people remain locked outside the gates of the economy.

The Presidency must be judged by whether it brings coherence to the work of government. That is why alignment between the Strategic Plan, the Annual Performance Plan and the Medium-Term Development Plan is critical. Every rand in this vote must serve a measurable developmental purpose.

The Presidency must therefore continue to play the role of the centre: convening, coordinating, unblocking, monitoring and insisting that delivery moves from announcement to implementation. This is what a capable developmental state must do.

The central crisis of our time remains unemployment. The official unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2026 was 32.7 percent. Behind that statistic are millions of human beings: young people who have never worked, parents who cannot provide, graduates who cannot enter professions,

workers displaced by deindustrialisation, and communities where unemployment has become almost hereditary.

The answer cannot be either public employment or industrialisation. It must be both. We must scale and accelerate public employment programmes as an immediate bridge into income, work experience, community value and skills. At the same time, we must move with greater speed to industrialise, beneficiate our minerals, rebuild manufacturing, expand agriculture and agro-processing, localise procurement, deepen township and rural economies, and create jobs for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers who cannot be told to wait for an economy that only rewards the already privileged.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention have shown what targeted public action can do. They have created millions of work and livelihood opportunities since 2020, especially for young people and women. These programmes are not a substitute for permanent employment. They are a bridge. They offer income where there was none, experience where the labour market demanded experience from people it had never employed, and public value in schools, communities, the arts, agriculture, care work and local services.

The task now is to consolidate Mr President, institutionalise and scale these interventions, while linking them more deliberately to pathways into permanent work, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, community service, cooperatives and productive sectors. Public employment must not be treated as charity. It must be treated as part of a democratic state's duty to mobilise human capacity for public good while the economy is rebuilt.

Industrialisation must be equally practical. The green economy must create local manufacturing jobs in components, installation, maintenance and grid expansion. Agriculture must support black commercial farmers, smallholders, irrigation, storage, logistics and agro-processing. The digital economy must open doors to global business services, coding, digital public infrastructure and township-based innovation. Infrastructure investment must repair roads, water networks, schools, clinics, human settlements, rail and ports. Mr President, every sector must be asked one question: how many South Africans does this move from the indignity of unemployment into the dignity of work?

Government cannot do this alone. But nor can government outsource its responsibilities to the market and hope that growth will arrive by sentiment. South Africa requires a serious national social compact, not a public relations exercise.

We call on business to invest, to stop hoarding capital in the face of national need, to open supply chains, to train young people, to comply with labour law and to support localisation.

We call on labour to continue defending hard-won worker rights while engaging honestly on productivity, skills, industrial renewal and the future of work.

We call on civil society, faith communities, youth formations, women's organisations and community structures to remain active partners in accountability, local development and social cohesion.

We call on African partners to work with South Africa on orderly, humane and lawful migration management, regional industrialisation and shared development. South Africa cannot prosper in a region that is collapsing, and the region cannot prosper if South Africa is weakened, isolated or destabilised.

Madam Speaker, thirty years ago our democratic founders did not promise an easy road. They promised freedom, democracy, human dignity and a state that would be used as an instrument to overcome the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. We have made progress. We have also made mistakes. We have stumbled, and at times we have disappointed our people. But we are not defeated, and we are not without instruments.

We have a resilient Constitution. We have democratic institutions that have withstood serious tests. We have a Presidency that must coordinate the rebuilding of the state, the acceleration of reform, the scaling of employment programmes, the defence of the rule of law and the repositioning of South Africa as a confident African state in a turbulent world.

By supporting Budget Vote 1, we choose constitutionalism over chaos, transformation over cynicism, delivery over empty slogans, Pan-African solidarity over xenophobia, lawful migration management over vigilantism, and the dignity of work over the despair of unemployment.

The ANC supports Budget Vote 1: The Presidency.

I thank you.