**Clean Audit does not equal good results**

Hon. Speaker, I think I will start on a somewhat positive note. I would like to congratulate the Department of Economic Development and Tourism for receiving a Clean Audit for the 2016/17 financial year. MEC Kholwane’s Department shows that if officials follow guidelines on proper accounting and supply chain management prescripts, any department can receive a clean Audit.

It will be an interesting read when the Annual Report of the Department is released around September.

Now, in reality, despite the Department receiving a clean audit, the performance of the economy paints a dim and very different picture.

This government is struggling to tackle the triple challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty.

Looking at unemployment with consideration of the latest available information from StatsSA. The expanded definition of unemployment is sitting at 42.1% as of the 4th quarter of 2016. This has increased from 39.4% from just a year ago. Over the same period, our Labour Force grew by 32 000, StatsSA monitored industries shed 36 000 jobs, meaning that over this period, 68 000 more people joined the ranks of the unemployed. Hon. Speaker, from a total Labour Force of 1.9 million, over 800 000 people are unemployed.

To assess inequality, we have to look at something called the gini-coefficient. A gini-coefficient of 0 means that society is equal and 1 means a single individual owns all the wealth in the province. Between 1996 and 2014, the gini-coefficient in the province increased from 0.59 to 0.61, with multiple credible sources estimating that in 2016 it could actually be at 0.65. Hon. Members, what this means is that inequality under this ANC-led government has increased. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

The fight against poverty is also looking rather dim. According to the Department's own documents, over the 13‐year period from 1996 to 2009, the poverty rate in Mpumalanga increased by 0.8% to 46.8%. According to StatsSA, the poverty headcount in Mpumalanga achieved a slight decrease from 7.9% in 2011 to 7.8% in 2016. 273 886 of households in Mpumalanga reported that they had run out of money in the last 12 months before the survey was conducted and 14.8 % of households in Mpumalanga missed a meal over the same period. These figures would have been much worse if social grants did not play a role in alleviating this poverty.

Hon. Speaker, the numbers don’t lie. Given these shocking statistics, it then becomes rather difficult to celebrate the Department's Clean Audit. In fact, the performance of the Department in relation to that of the economy points to major flaws in the economic policies and programmes implemented by this current administration.

Hon. Kholwane, our communities may not know how to access these figures, but they are a living manifestation of this current government's failures.

Looking at the budget, please ensure that the merger of the Mpumalanga Liquor Authority and Mpumalanga Gambling Board is completed in the most cost-effective and timeous manner. We can’t afford another situation like MEGA, where almost a decade later, it’s still undergoing organisational restructuring.

Hon. MEC, please ensure that MTPA utilises its budget for biodiversity conservation and tourism marketing. The running of reserves and parks need to be put out on concession and the funds used to support the other 2 functions mentioned above. We need to ensure that we never find ourselves in an embarrassing situation whereby we fail to attend the Annual Tourism Indaba.

And lastly, MEGA. All Hon. Members are aware that anything MEGA touches, turns into ash. The DA once again calls for the disbandment of MEGA. The parastatal is a hotspot of looting and corruption and will continue to bring this province down. Over the last 5 years, MEGA has only advanced R47 million to SMMEs, Co-ops, agricultural enterprises and home buyers. With MEGA involved, the Fresh Produce Market is now revised to be completed in the year 2025, while MEGA will be making 5% commission for being the implementing agent for this project.

In consideration of the above, the Democratic Alliance will not be supporting this budget vote.