

The Electricity Crisis in South Africa – What is to be done?

Speech by Traverse Le Goff MP, DA Additional Member on the Portfolio Committee on Mineral Resources and Energy

Chairperson,

Our country is at a critical juncture in its history, and the primary determinant that will decide whether South Africa becomes a failed state, or alternatively becomes a resurgent, modern, forward-looking regional power in Africa will be entirely decided by how we respond to our national Electricity Crisis.

While there are many pathways which we can take to respond to this crisis, there are only a few that have any reasonable prospect of success. All of these solutions, in some manner of speaking involve in the short term – obtaining as much power as is practically possible from Eskom's installed generation capacity. And over the long term, all of them involve additional energy generation capacity being produced by sources that are external to Eskom.

We only have to look to a country like Vietnam to see what is possible with the right kind of leadership: They managed to install over 9GW of rooftop solar PV and wind energy generation capacity in just one single year. In the year 2020 Vietnam effectively ended our electricity crisis in just 12 months. Something we have not been able to achieve in 17 years. So the question is not whether we can do this in South Africa, we absolutely can. The real question we should be asking ourselves is who exactly is standing in the way of us achieving these types of outcomes?

It is also very important to acknowledge the reality of the Climate Crisis in this debate. It is for this reason that the Just Energy Transition must provide us with the necessary guardrails to ensure that we steer our country toward a type of energy resilience which is fundamentally sustainable, and that does not borrow from our children's futures to take easy shortcuts that might inadvertently precipitate an even more dangerous environmental crisis for us to deal with in the future.

But we also need to have a very honest conversation about where we now find ourselves. The age of centralised state-owned power generation in South Africa has passed. We have had our chance at running an all-encompassing power utility that could have produced cheap and affordable electricity for us all. But the truth is that after nearly 2 decades of criminality, mismanagement, and a generalised lack of care, the Eskom that existed 20 years ago is no more, and there is just no way to realistically return it back to its former glory.

The Democratic Alliance is under absolutely no illusion about just how difficult the challenge before us is going to be to overcome. The threat of a catastrophic national blackout looms large. Our economy is faltering and all of our socio-economic progress as a country hangs in the balance.

Though we desperately need Eskom to be stabilised and to remove the criminality which is so deeply ingrained within it, we have acknowledged the harsh reality that former CEO of Eskom,

Mr. Andre De Ruyter has made so explicitly clear: A single point of electricity production and supply in South Africa is also our single greatest point of weakness.

This is why where the DA-governs, in places like the City of Cape Town and Nelson Mandela Bay we are rapidly moving to procure additional sources of energy from the private sector to protect South Africans from state failure.

Later this month Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis will put out to the market a tender for 500MW of dispatchable energy capacity, placing it on track to protect its residents from the first 4 stages of load-shedding.

That is also why the DA-led Western Cape Government is spending 1.1 Billion Rand in the coming year to reduce its dependence on Eskom.

Only the DA is responding to the Electricity Crisis at a pace and scale that meets the present moment of urgency head-on. Only a diversified, decentralised, green energy system will be resilient enough to meet our present and future energy demands and lead us to the peaceful and prosperous South Africa we all still dream of.