Democratic Alliance speech by

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#GPSOPA2024: Nothing new, only empty promises to the residents of Gauteng

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**Madam Speaker;**

The residents of Gauteng are tired of empty promises, tired of living in terrible conditions, and tired of eating breadcrumbs, yet the resources meant to improve their lives are being mismanaged and looted under the watch of those who claim to care about them. Gauteng residents first demonstrated their dissatisfaction during the 2016 municipal elections; however, their call for good governance and service delivery has fallen on deaf ears. This is because nothing has changed; their suffering has worsened, yet we continue to be told the same promises that were made last year by the Premier and his predecessor, David Makhura.

I am reminded of the wise words of Abraham Lincoln, who once said, “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” In three months, this current government will be licking its wounds as they will be removed from government through a ballot paper. This government has failed dismally and can no longer be trusted to deliver services.

**Township Economy**

This year again, we were told about how the Premier intends to grow the economy. This is nothing new. Last year, we were told that special attention would be given to the township's economic development. We agreed with this sentiment. However, when looking at the quarterly reports of the Gauteng Department of Economic Development (GDED), the target of creating jobs in the township economy was not met for the second quarter of the 2023/2024 financial year. The Township Economic Development Act was passed by this house to improve the livelihoods of our residents who live in the townships.

Nearly five years ago, I visited the Industrial Hub in Pennyville, where goods such as furniture are manufactured. I visited this industrial hub again earlier this year, and the conditions under which they must work have not changed. Red tape remains a problem for small businesses. They are unable to directly put in a tender for some jobs and must rely on bigger companies to subcontract to them. This is not building the township economy. Red tape should be reduced across the board to make doing business with the government easier. This will grow our economy by leaps and bounds.

**Growing the economy, load-shedding, and infrastructure**

**Madam Speaker,**if this government is serious about growing the economy, as was mentioned in the SOPA last year and this year, then proper plans will be put in place to minimise the impact of load-shedding on this province. Last year and this year, we were told that there were plans in place to procure more electricity. We again heard about the solar farm in Merafong. We are told about an Emergency Energy Council that has been established to look at ways of mitigating the impact load-shedding has on this province. But let’s interrogate this supposed plan:

* Removal of all illegal electricity connections;
* Roll out of smart meters for every household and business in Gauteng;
* Cleaning up the municipal billing system to improve revenue collection;
* Cleaning up the indigent register and
* Fixing all broken transformers.

These steps taken by the provincial government focus on general maintenance, which will have no impact on reducing load-shedding in the province. Furthermore, the provincial government does not have any plans to engage with Independent Power Producers (IPPs). Instead, a budget has been set aside for municipalities to support the rollout of various energy interventions. We are all aware that many of our municipalities are unable to manage their finances properly. Yet, they are expected to engage with IPPs on their own and manage the budget allocated for this.

This year there was no mention in SOPA about lifestyle audits, yet a year ago we were told that this process had been finalised and that the audits would be made public. Lifestyle audits play a crucial role in clamping down on corruption. It is high time the lifestyle audit reports were made public.

As much as we have the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and now the Nasi Ispani programmes, these jobs are not long-term and only provide jobs for a short period. So, on paper, the number of jobs created looks like a lot, but when you drill down to the nitty-gritty many of our youth remain unemployed. Yes, they are provided with much-needed skills, but what are we doing as a government to ensure that they are offered long-term employment? Do we have a database of everyone who has taken part in the EPWP programmes? Are we able to track how successful the skills training programmes are that they participate in?

**Madam Speaker, Honourable Premier,** this is the information we need to be informed about during the yearly SOPA.

Another key driver of job opportunities in the infrastructure sector. However, as much as we hear about state-of-the-art hospitals and schools and the Kopanong Precinct, not much has been done by this department. Key infrastructure projects like the building of schools, clinics, hospitals, and libraries are not completed on time and within budget. The Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development (GDID) is not able to manage projects efficiently. Several projects have run over time and exceeded budget. Migration to the province means that there is a need for more facilities to be built, yet often there is shoddy workmanship or the contractor leaves the site due to non-payment. It is high time that something is done about this, and we will offer possible solutions to this problem.

**Upgrading of Informal Settlements, Hostels, and Service Delivery**

**Madam Speaker;**

Over the last five years, we have heard that this provincial government intends to release land parcels and upgrade informal settlements so that residents have access to basic services. On Monday, we again heard how this government intends to upgrade informal settlements by accelerating their plans to decongest and relocate people from informal settlements to more habitable land.

Of the approximately 700 informal settlements, plans are underway to upgrade 68. Let me repeat that plans are underway to upgrade 68 informal settlements. This means that nothing has been done yet to improve the lives of the residents living in these uninhabitable conditions. We know this because during our regular oversight inspections, we witness the inhumane conditions that our residents are forced to live in, while the government waxes lyrical over Mega Housing Projects, many of which are still incomplete.

Residents living in hostels across this province live in atrocious conditions. Last year, we visited the Madala hostel in Alexandra. The wrenching stench of accumulated sewerage blocked drains, and heaps of rubbish indicates that the Provincial Government and the City of Johannesburg have abandoned these residents. The windows are broken, and the ceiling on the one section that was destroyed by fire some years ago remains in a state of disrepair. It is unacceptable that our residents are forced to live in these conditions while temporary containers to house them have been standing empty for the last five years.

Yesterday, I conducted an oversight inspection at the Helen Joseph Women’s Hostel in Alexandra. I engaged with a lady who has been living there since 1975. Over the years, she has seen the place deteriorate. But the most heartbreaking fact is that she has now accepted that she might die at this hostel without anything being done to improve their living conditions.

**Madam Speaker;**

Service delivery continues to deteriorate in this province, despite being told by the Premier and his predecessor that the situation will improve. In Emfuleni, residents live in filth, they have a limited supply of water and go daily without access to electricity. This is not due to load-shedding but is because this municipality is unable to pay its debt owed to Eskom and Rand Water.

This week, Premier Lesufi indicated that where municipalities are unable to deliver proper services to the residents of this province, the provincial government will step in to ensure that refuse is collected, and that water and electricity are supplied. This is all good and well, but instead of spending unnecessary money on doing this, why not ensure that municipalities are adequately equipped with officials who are fit for duty and able to deliver services? All we are doing now is putting a band-aid on the problem that will continue to fester and then spiral into an uncontrollable epidemic.

The private partnership with Telkom, Herotel, and Broadband Infraco is a step in the right direction; however, we have heard on previous occasions that all areas in Gauteng will be connected to the Gauteng Broadband Network (GBN). However, it appears as if this will only be completed this year.

**e-Tolls and Crime**

Since 2019, we have been told that e-tolls will be scrapped. Last year, with much fanfare, we were told in this house that e-tolls were a thing of the past. Yet a year later, we are now told that the process of scrapping e-tolls will only begin at the end of March when the switching off of the gantries process will begin. Furthermore, we have since learned that this government has approached a government financial institution for a loan to pay for Gauteng’s portion of the e-toll debt. This debt currently stands at R12,9 billion. So, while e-tolls may be scrapped, the provincial government must find some way of paying for them, and the only way this can be done would be through higher taxes, and this does not ease the burden on our residents who are already living on the breadline.

Crime remains a huge problem in this province. Last year, we were told about helicopters and drones that would be procured to increase the safety of our residents. However, residents living in areas that are riddled with crime have not seen any decrease. Hundreds of crime wardens have been recruited to help keep the community safe, but we are not told what impact this has had on crime levels in the province. Our police and Community Police Forums (CPFs) need to be given all the necessary resources to fight crime in this province. We know that many police stations do not have sufficient vehicles and cannot function properly during load-shedding. This puts our residents at a disadvantage. They are not able to report crime after a certain time at some police stations because of this lack of resources. CPFs play a critical role in the community, and they need to be given adequate resources to conduct patrols during the day and night, particularly when there is load-shedding. Surely this should have been done first before appointing crime wardens.

**Our solution**

**Madam Speaker;**

We need to fix what is broken with this province, and we need many Master Plans urgently if we are to win in fixing Gauteng.

* We need a Gauteng Water Infrastructure Master Plan.
* We need a Gauteng Roads Infrastructure Build and Maintenance Master Plan.
* We need a Gauteng ICT Master Plan.
* We need a Gauteng Electricity Masterplan.

The residents of Gauteng need a government that puts proper solutions in place instead of making excuses. We need a government that is committed to stamping out corruption. We need a government that ensures that all small businesses that want to do business with the government can do so and that tenders are not only awarded to certain individuals who are connected to the government. We need a government that is committed to the safety and well-being of all Gauteng residents. Finally, a government that puts the needs of our residents first is a DA government.

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