

HONOURABLE MS THABETHE'S SPEECH
CHAIRPERSON OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PORTFOLIO
COMMITTEE FOR ENERGY

Programme Director,

Ministers of Energy, Ms Dipuo Peters

Executive Mayors, Mayors and other Councillors,

MECs,

Members of the business community,

Senior Government Officials,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The South African Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, provide for certain rights that we need to constantly keep in mind as Government and as the Ruling Party, the ANC, as we seek to define the policy direction and provide public goods and services. Of critical importance are the following Rights:

The Right to:

- have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures, and
- Secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.
- Have access to adequate housing.

We are noting that access to energy is critical in the livelihoods of millions of our people exist.

When we assumed office in 1994, access to electricity stood at 36% when the electricity system has more than adequate excess capacity.

We have made significant progress and to date we have been able to extend the access to a number of services to many of our people. Access to electricity has reached 70 percent of what we ought to make available to all our people. This we are able to do despite the rapidly increasing population growth and the challenges that we face in the region.

We have then progressed to look beyond the provision of access to capital goods like electrification infrastructure. We advanced to providing access to operational subsidies and grants such as free basic electricity to the indigent.

While energy prices have been relatively affordable to many, the same cannot be said about the majority of our people, who have continued to be engaged in a life and death battle for survival.

You will have noticed that as Government, we have continued to extend the helping hand by continuing to improve the lives of our citizens...Recently, we have put in place a program to progressively increase the age of access by young people to the social grants as recently announced by the Minister of Finance.

On the energy front, we have continued to see more challenges bedeviling this sector. The volatile crude oil prices, accompanied by the increasing prices of petrol and the impact that this had on the economy and the eventual stability of our currency.

We have seen the collapse of some of the major economies in the world and the repercussions that this has had on the economies of the developing countries as exports plummeted, jobs got lost and the stock markets crushed, and the under-collections that the Revenue Services had to contend with. This has had serious implications for our country as we had to contend with reduced revenues resulting in budget cuts. We have also seen how the costs of the capital program for the expansion of the electricity generation capacity of our national utility has increased over the months. Accordingly our major challenge is the need to raise sufficient capital to ensure security of supply.

This state of affairs, which has started over time, and culminated in the financial and resource tightrope that we all are walking, has encouraged us to look at alternatives in the provision of energy services.

You will recall that in our resolution in Polokwane, we had put energy issues high on the agenda. In particular, we resolved to:

- Ensure security of supply of energy resources, and pursuing an energy mix that includes clean and renewable resources to meet the needs of our fast growing economy without compromising our commitment to sustainable development.
- Put more effort on a greater contribution of renewable energy sources, including solar and wind power.
- Put in place a clear programme of incentives for investment, as well as the development of the requisite human resource capacity to take full advantage of the opportunities presented due to the growth in this sector.

These principles will have to underpin every initiative that the Ministry of Energy will have to put in place for the sustainable development of the energy sector.

Deployments of solar technologies should ultimately be a lifestyle issue in South Africa since we have excellent radiation of the sun in almost all provinces, with the greatest radiation levels in the Northern Cape.

We need to recognise that clean and renewable resources are needed to be exploited by the current and future generations. Since time immemorial, our country has relied on burning fossil fuels for almost all our thermal heating applications. This is no longer as sustainable as it was particularly in the case during the period of climate change.

Minister Peters, you have our unqualified support as Parliament of a democratic South Africa. In particular your endeavour to bring about an energy mix that will ensure the prevalence of clean energy for future posterity.

We need to ensure that this project is a success and that is extended to assist our brothers and sisters in Africa and in the Diaspora.

As we use to say during the dark days of the liberation struggle, we need to see the benefits of the climate change initiative “in our life time”. Copenhagen to us should provide a good start. It is our intention not to rely on the international climate change instruments alone, but that we also use our limited means to advance the attainment of the commitments we have made, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The success and growth of the South African economy rests on the sustainability of the energy sector. We want to see wealth, skills, enterprise development, job creation and prosperity being advanced through interventions such as this one.

We have the tools in our hands to shape our own destiny . Let’s work together, as government, private sector as well as civil society, for the benefit of all.

Minister, I wish you well in this endeavour.

Thank you.