

Premier's Opening Address on the occasion of the first session of the 7th Parliament of the Western Cape: 31 July 2024

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker,
Honourable members of the Provincial Cabinet,
Honourable members of the Provincial Legislature and Leader of the Opposition,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Mayors from our municipalities,
Members of the media,
Distinguished guests.

Good morning, goeie môre, molweni to you the residents of our beautiful province.

Protecting and upholding our democracy

This year we joined 2 billion other people in over 50 countries who went to the ballot box to make their mark in defending and deepening democracy.

In too many places, democracy is in danger and under attack from extremism, populism, and nationalism. Many of us feared that here in South Africa those pernicious voices would win.

However, rationality and tolerance prevailed. We eschewed violence and dangerous politicking, in the interests of the majority of our residents.

While we have **emerged from the 2024 general elections with optimism and hope**, that a different trajectory is possible for this country, I am deeply concerned by the number of South Africans who did not vote. We must all reflect on why so many of our citizens are not exercising a right that countless people fought so hard for; and is at the core of sustaining our democracy.

Of our registered voter population of 27.7 million people, only 16.2 million cast their ballots, and our turnout of eligible voters has dropped from approximately 86% in 1994, to 41% in 2024. Put simply, **four in 10 eligible voters voted in what many termed the most important elections since 1994.**

As **public representatives we must ask why and how** we can reverse this trend of so many opting out of the democratic process. As the Western Cape Government, we must reflect on how we find **ways to talk and work with our residents in a way that makes them feel seen, treated with dignity and respect**, as well as engaged as active residents of our province.

Too many times on the campaign trail residents said to me, "What's the point in voting... why should I bother... things won't change." I call on each one of us here in this legislature, and in this government to make sure that over the next term we **demonstrate to our residents why they matter and how, through our work, we build this province for them and for our future.**

Our rhetoric as **public representatives matters**. It is our duty to hold the space for difficult conversations, not further inflame them or create anxiety for our residents.

I have already met with the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I look forward to many engagements with colleagues in this house. We are all here to serve the residents of this province.

I expect and welcome the members of this house holding this government accountable in a respectful, manner.

And while I am deeply concerned about how many citizens have chosen to disengage, I am also filled with **commitment to not waste this precious moment.**

With this new Government of National Unity (GNU) we are reminded of the founding principles of the South Africa that was born in 1994 also under a grand coalition: equal opportunities, inclusiveness, and fighting for the respect the rule of law.

I am reminded of what our late former President, Nelson Mandela, said at his inauguration:

“Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity’s belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all hopes for glorious life for all”

Thank you for the trust you have placed in us

The residents of our extraordinary province have shown faith in us by giving us their majority vote, and I do not take this trust for granted. I will work even harder for our residents every single day for the next five years.

Thank you to the voters and to this house for the honour that you have given me to **serve as your Premier, I am deeply humbled.**

There are formidable challenges ahead of us and we must confront them together if we are to lift the most vulnerable in society out of poverty, jumpstart the economy, and build South Africa and this province now and for our future.

Government must work FOR YOU

I am grateful that we are not starting from scratch. Over the past 5 years, we have built a solid foundation of clean governance and good service delivery despite many challenges,

We are ready to do more!

The Western Cape Government is committed to doing everything we can to help the GNU succeed FOR YOU the residents of our province. We must build on the successes that this government achieved over the past 5 years. We will work closely with other spheres of government. We **will support them when it is in the interests of our residents and fight for our residents when we do not believe that they are doing so.**

We are committed to cooperative governance, but we will also hold national government to account.

A critical focus of this government over the next five years will be **financial sustainability.** We cannot build more hospitals and roads, employ more teachers and doctors and serve our communities if we do not get the funding our residents deserve.

Last year, we were placed in an unacceptable position amid the 2023 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) due to the centrally agreed public sector wage bill, well in excess of inflation and way over what was budgeted for.

Our residents were forced to endure **unprecedented in-year cuts**, compromising budgets. These budget cuts are hitting frontline government services such as education, health care, and social development the hardest. It is the most vulnerable in society who are feeling the impact most acutely.

We had little choice but to declare an intergovernmental dispute (IGD) with national government.

We have proven that by taking this step, we can raise challenging issues with National Government constructively.

The WCG endeavoured to see the IGD to its conclusion and recognised that this was a well-facilitated process that was rooted in the **spirit of cooperative governance**. The IGD sought to lay out clear principles for how future wage deals are to be agreed.

We pioneered this process, not just in the interests of the residents of this province, but for all provinces.

We have committed to work with National Treasury and Minister Gondongwana, **but we will not hesitate to act if we feel that that the spirit of cooperation, we achieved in resolving this dispute is broken or compromised**.

And while we pioneered the IGD process, I have given our newly appointed provincial Minister of Finance very clear instructions to work with National Treasury to ensure that we get our fair share of national funding. The current system is iniquitous and has to change.

The Western **Cape has the fastest-growing population in South Africa**.

Nationally we have the third highest population, yet we only get the **fifth largest budgetary allocation**.

This is not right, and we are going to **fight for what our residents justly deserve**.

Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal face similar pressures, they also deserve their **fair share of funding**, so that their residents, like ours, get the services they need and deserve.

But as a provincial government we also must explore **alternative funding opportunities**, and over the next five years I will be holding this government to account to make sure that we diversify our revenue streams wherever we can.

With the excellent **track record of good governance** that we have worked so hard to achieve, there are so many opportunities out there for us to **pursue borrowing for the critical mega-investments** we want to do. It is something that I identified as a task for Provincial Treasury in my previous term but with the countless crises we were faced with and the disruption of COVID-19 we did not put the necessary resources into pursuing borrowing and financing opportunities. When I leave this office at the end of my term, I want us to have **secured the deals that our track record of delivery enables us to do, in order to make those future investments possible and secure our financial sustainability**.

Building on our successes by becoming a more future-fit province

Building for the future is not just about fiscal sustainability, it is also **about developing the right policies and ensuring that they are implemented now**. We must work better now, for the future.

This government has learned to become more agile and nimble given the often unpredictable environment in which we have to operate. We have weathered so much thanks in large part to the dedication of the 90 000 people who work for this government.

It is anticipated that the population of the Western Cape will reach 10 million people by 2040.

Up to 150 000 people are moving to this province each year, in large part because of our commitment to good governance and a jobs-rich economy.

But this population growth comes with significant challenges. It places **increased pressure on us all**, especially our budgets.

Initiatives such as the **Rapid School Build programme** are one such intervention that is aimed at keeping up with the increasing numbers of learners seeking a quality education in the Western Cape and redressing the inequities of our past.

To accommodate the annual increase in learners, over the past 5 years, this programme has seen over **2 000 new classrooms built provincewide, including 48 new classrooms for learners with special needs**.

I had the pleasure of visiting the site of a new school in Lwandle that is under construction through this programme. Brick by brick we are constructing dignified places of teaching and learning.

An ever-increasing population and climate change are also placing our natural resources, our infrastructure and our agricultural sector under more pressure.

Managing precious resources such as water is vitally important, and it is why I have added **water security to my own list of priorities**.

Our dams may be *propvol* right now, but we **cannot be assured of our water security next year**. About three weeks before those torrential downpours in the first weeks of July, our Minister of Local Government and Environmental Affairs and Development Planning was putting the finishing touches to a report to our provincial Cabinet to plan for the implementation of water restrictions after a very dry winter. This is the world we live in now. Nothing is predictable; we cannot take anything for granted.

We are all too familiar with the phrase “Day Zero” and we must plan sufficiently and accordingly to ensure our province is water-secure and resilient. From that “close shave” with disaster we learned important lessons. This is why we are implementing the **15-year Western Cape Integrated Drought and Water Resilience Plan** to better manage the supply and demand for this precious resource.

Responding efficiently & effectively to disasters

Our province is feeling the **fury of the climate change crisis**. It is unfolding before our eyes.

On Monday last week, the Earth had **its hottest day on record**, beating the previous record set 24 hours earlier. It is insane that at the same time I was in the media talking about “ducks paddling on the N1”.

Each year we are seeing **more severe fires, heavier rainfall, and floods than ever before**.

For virtually every month this year so far, there has been a major disaster: from vicious fires to a mass power outage in the Karoo to heavy rains and floods.

In May a **man-made disaster** left more than 30 people dead and dozens more injured.

I vividly remember arriving at the site where an entire building in George collapsed. The scale of that disaster was heartbreaking.

But in a matter of minutes and hours, the site of the tragedy was swarming with disaster management officials of all kinds, who **seamlessly worked together to save lives**.

It was through this incredible cooperation that Gabriel Guambe, was pulled from the debris more than 100 hours after the collapse. I still get *hoendervleis* when I **recall that moment on Saturday, 11 May when Gabriel's arm was lifted** as he was stretchered from the rubble.

It was through the unwavering dedication and professionalism of our disaster officials that Gabriel and so many others are saved.

Just some of those **extraordinary people are with us in the gallery today and I want to pause** for a moment to recognise them and the thousands of people who work with them in every single disaster and emergency. **You are extraordinary and epitomise so much of what this government strives to be.**

And while we celebrate the many lives saved, my thoughts remain with the families of those who perished.

We will do everything in our power to ensure that those responsible for this unspeakable tragedy face the consequences of their negligence.

In the face of every disaster, our **steady investment in our disaster management systems is paying off**. Over the years, we have consistently built up a solid and professional network of experts who are equipped with the resources they need to respond to whatever disaster comes our way.

Our Provincial Disaster Management Centre is at the centre of our entire disaster management system, coordinating and guiding the numerous components that make up this vital life-saving network.

We deeply appreciate the speedy classification and declaration of a provincial disaster in the wake of the destruction wreaked by the severe weather that hit the province earlier this month. But we are **still owed the R1,3 billion in disaster funding** for a series of floods that occurred in the province in 2023 from national government, and I will **hold them to account for the funding that we need to rebuild**.

But we need to start **working very differently as a government** if we are going to withstand an increasingly erratic and unstable natural environment.

In the immediate term I have asked the ministers and departments of Infrastructure, Agriculture, Local Government and Environmental Affairs and Development Planning to **urgently identify the infrastructure, land and water sources that could be vulnerable to flooding and fires in this financial year. We must look at how we can mitigate these risks now.** The town of Citrusdal has already been cut-off twice due to flooding in the last 12 months, we have lost the N2 at Bot River once and countless roads have had to be closed.

I also support our Minister of Infrastructure in his engagements with the National Minister of Human Settlements to **review the centralisation of the emergency housing funding model** – it is taking too long to get emergency housing relief to vulnerable residents.

I will also be working closely with the **Premiers of the other coastal provinces** to see how we can work together to develop better approaches to the impact of climate change on our residents.

And in the medium and longer term we need to do **evidence-based reviews of our natural, agricultural and built environments.** We need to make the **hard decisions and actions now** to build a more *veerkragtige* province that can withstand this unpredictable environment.

Embracing Innovation and Technology

Anyone who spends more than a few minutes with me knows how much I love technology and innovation. And I am even happier when **tech and the growing world of artificial intelligence help us improve service delivery and reduce the burden on our staff.**

We hold innovation very close to our heart in this government. Innovation allows us to approach issues, resolve problems, and improve how we work in unique and different ways.

The health sector is leading the way in exploring these new technologies. One such way is our use of **robotic surgeries.** In the past 5 years, this government has delivered two surgical robots that have performed over **500 procedures at Tygerberg and Groote Schuur Hospitals.**

Recently the provincial Department of Health and Wellness was part of a Robotic Surgery Indaba held at Groote Schuur Hospital where we **could collectively showcase the important work this innovation is doing to improve medical services for our residents.**

In our efforts to fight and prevent crime, technology is also playing a far more prominent role. In February, several of our district municipalities received **donations of drones** to give law enforcement agencies an edge and “eyes in the sky” to assist officers.

And just last week we **launched the Social Work Integrated Management System (SWIMS) Application.** The app aims to **reduce the administrative burden on our social workers** so that they can focus more of their energy on supporting vulnerable residents through therapeutic interventions.

Our embrace of innovation is being noticed and recognised. Last month, we scooped the esteemed **Public Service Innovation Award at the United Nations Public Service Forum,** which took place in South Korea, beating 400 entries from over 70 countries.

Recognising YOU, our residents

And while we will continue to invest heavily in innovation and technology we know that it is the **connection, the conversation, holding your hand and showing that you the care, that must be at the heart** of everything we do.

If I reflect on the countless **First Thursdays** we have hosted and the many chats I have had with residents, sometimes I cannot unfortunately solve all their problems; but we can give them the **respect of listening to what they have to say and the chance to feel heard** – just in the listening and hearing, we can show them that their voice matters.

Technology cannot and will not replace our commitment to making sure that in every space where we interact with our citizens we show them that we see them and we recognise their individual experiences. I have asked the Director-General to work with my office and the various departments across government to look at how we can firstly, **further improve how our staff interact with our residents and secondly ensure that the places where we engage with them are clean, maintained and cared for**. I will continue with my programme of unannounced visits to ensure that our facilities give our residents the best that we can offer. While I know that queues might be longer at times, that sometimes your call might take a bit more time to be answered, **it makes it a little bit easier if the place in which you are waiting is clean and dignified and that our staff are friendly and receptive**.

The finer details must matter to us as a government. We pride ourselves on offering quality public services, and so we must also take pride in how our facilities look and function. And we take **pride in our staff**. We have a long way to go on our culture journey as a government, but you, our Western Cape Government family, matter and that is one of the many reasons why I am so proud of our **TOPCO award for being a Top Employer**.

With our staff, we are governing **FOR YOU our residents**.

Our **residents are our eyes and ears** out there: when schools get vandalised during the holidays, or a government vehicle gets stoned, or a social worker or an ambulance gets hijacked it is our **residents who can put an end to that and take responsibility**; because this is the school that your child attends or government vehicle that brings medicines to your door or takes your loved ones to hospital in an emergency.

Our residents have shown the **power of partnership when responding to crises**: they drop off blankets and food when their fellow resident loses their house to a fire or a flood; they bring eye drops and Energade for our fire fighters exhausted from fighting a blaze, but they also step-up and paint walls in Mitchells Plain that are covered in graffiti and help pick up litter on our beaches.

Our commitment to our priorities remains unwavering

While we mark the start of the 7th administration, we will continue to focus on our priorities of:

- Building a growing, inclusive infrastructure-led economy that creates jobs
- Building our energy and water security

- Creating safer communities and devolving law enforcement resources and decisions
- Further improving the province's education and healthcare systems

Jobs are the bedrock of building a prosperous province

I am obsessed with jobs and enabling more jobs, because with a job so much is unlocked for our residents.

We have already done so much as a government to make it easier for the private sector to create much-needed jobs. This province has the highest number of households that derive their income from a salary at 74,6%.

And we are determined to make it as easy as possible for the private sector to do business and create more jobs in our province.

We are doing it through initiatives like our **Red Tape Reduction Unit** which makes it easier for businesses to get off the ground and grow. In the last five years this unit's work resulted in a **R2.4 billion** saving for the economy

Small and medium-sized businesses are the engines of our economic growth, working at the coalface of the economy.

Our **SMME Booster fund** has assisted over **hundreds of SMMEs, sustaining thousands of jobs** and counting and we are going to put even more **funding support into SMME business development over this term.**

The Growth For Jobs (G4J) strategy – our overarching blueprint for breakout economic growth - is already one year old, and we are seeing encouraging outcomes from this bold plan to fuel economic growth.

It has set us on a path to building a **strong, inclusive, and diverse economy** in which all our residents benefit. Just some of the achievements of the work across government include:

- 1 684 businesses supported;
- 15 304 jobs created or sustained;
- R7.5 billion in new investments facilitated;
- R2.8 billion export declarations reached, of which R1 billion was for export to Africa;
- 28 348 residents supported with at least 1 economic opportunity pathway; and
- 14 Ease of Doing Business improvement interventions supported.

It is through continued work like this that we will **bring our unemployment rate below 20%**. And while the Western Cape is the province with the lowest unemployment rate, it remains stubbornly high and for too many of our residents **the statistics do not match up with their daily experience.**

We need to make sure that the foundations for a thriving jobs environment are in place. That is why we will work tirelessly with the GNU to ensure that **Operation Vulindela's plans are implemented.** Here in the Western Cape, we want to see it make an impact on **improving the viability of our port, freight, and logistics networks,** because we need to get this economy moving.

While it is encouraging to see more trains on our railways, there are still not nearly enough to transport goods to market.

I urge the GNU to **prioritise seeking private investment opportunities for the Port of Cape Town**, because agriculture is a critical economic enabler of the province, with well over 50% of South Africa's agricultural exports coming from here.

To enable jobs in agriculture, we have provided agricultural education and training to **2 248 registered students, offered short skills courses to 17 098 beneficiaries, and approved financial support to 539 qualifying students in the last five years.**

We have also supported land reform initiatives in the province: **83% of land reform farmers supported by this government consider themselves successful agri-businesses.**

The Western Cape is open for business: attracting more investment

If we are to attract more investment from both within our province and from abroad, we need to show investors that their faith in us, along with their resources, is safe and viable.

Earlier this year the RMB/BER Business Confidence Index (BCI) showed that confidence in our province is well above other provinces.

The BCI reflected a 3-point increase in confidence levels in the Western Cape from 2023Q4 to 2024Q1, **improving from 37 points to 40, out of a possible 100.** This was on the back of consecutive increases in business confidence in the province and the longest sustained increase in Western Cape business confidence since quarter two of 2018.

But we must do so much more, because the challenges are still so severe.

Infrastructure Development

I have once again made infrastructure-led economic growth and job creation a core priority of my term.

I am going to work tirelessly to get the **critical mega-projects off the ground that we need to enable our economy to thrive.** One of the critical steps is to create an infrastructure pipeline because we know that it takes time to get these projects "shovel-ready" and then to get the infrastructure built.

We set up the Department of Infrastructure with the sole purpose of building a **future-proof province with its foundations in innovation, empowerment, and integration.**

And there are people across this government who are looking at how we can jumpstart our economy through infrastructure investment. For example, work is currently under way to drive a plan that could see this government investing R32.12 billion in fixed assets, catalytic growth projects, and agricultural infrastructure to stimulate an estimated R73 billion in capital formation and investment directly and indirectly in our economy over the next three years. This alone could generate 103 000 jobs, 61% of which would be semi and unskilled employment.

The Western Cape is leading in the delivery of affordable housing with the **First Home Finance programme.**

We are building homes as fast as we can. Since 2019 we have provided over **43 000 housing opportunities**.

To restore dignity to vulnerable residents, this government is working hard to ensure housing beneficiaries receive their title deeds, concluding their journey to officially owning their homes.

Between 2019 and 2023, **17 705 title deeds** were registered for new developments.

From the moment a recipient of a home, built by our Department of Infrastructure, leaves through their front door to go to work or school, they will travel on a road likely constructed by this government.

We want to ensure residents experience the professionalism, thought, and care that we invest in rolling out our vital infrastructure.

In April 2024, Minister of Infrastructure Tertuis Simmers and I officially opened the **N7 Refinery Interchange. This R250 million project** was the product of years of meticulously planned hard work aimed at connecting communities.

This interchange is far more than just tar, steel, and cement. It should also be seen as an **economic enabler linking citizens to economic opportunities**. And just this month, we gave an important update on the **R640 million Malmesbury Bypass** upgrades in the Swartland region. These upgrades are significant components of the Strategic Integrated Project 5, under the National Infrastructure Plan 2050. Construction started in May 2023 and the project is expected to be completed by November 2025.

Giving our residents the skills they need to prosper

But our residents, particularly our youth, need skills to be able to participate in infrastructure-led economic growth. Through the **Masakh'iSizwe Bursary Programme**, which is unique to the Western Cape, **hundreds of young people have been supported** to pursue their dreams of obtaining an opportunity to study in the infrastructure field at partner higher education institutions.

Our YearBeyond Programme remains an important initiative that continues to provide unemployed young people between the ages of 18 and 25 with a helping hand as they prepare themselves for the job market.

More than **10 000 "Yeboneers"** have benefited from this programme over the past 5 years.

YearBeyond sees the immense potential in young people who want to make a success of their lives. It provides participants with the support they need to turn their dreams into reality and fosters future generations of leaders.

Recently, the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport hosted over 1 000 youths as part of the YearBeyond Annual Conference. Much like our Day of 1 000 Opportunities initiative, this conference served as a **launch pad for young people who are embarking on their journey into their future careers**.

The I-CAN Centre, located in Elsie's River, has provided over **15 000 skills development initiatives** to date.

Since 2020, the Western Cape Government's Experiential Learning programme has helped about **12 420 young, unemployed South Africans**, from disadvantaged backgrounds to secure permanent or contract jobs in the Western Cape.

But the sobering fact remains that far too many people, **especially young people, are not able to find work**. We as a provincial government must take action to show them that despite their circumstances, we are here to help lift them up and show them the way to their full potential.

We must serve as the nexus where employers and employees meet and go on to work together. Programmes like our **Jobseekers Travel Voucher** seek to connect jobseekers with potential employers. The pilot initiative offers jobseekers free travel to interviews using Golden Arrow Bus Services vehicles. The programme has recognised that access to transport is a critical hurdle for many young people seeking work opportunities.

Securing our energy future

But we cannot grow our economy if we do not have affordable, decarbonised, reliable energy.

We are close to 4 months with no load shedding and an improved Energy Availability Factor (EAF) which from a generation perspective is great news. However, in the greater Energy Supply Industry (ESI) we are being confronted with the next hurdles that could lead us back to load shedding. We must urgently fix the country's constrained national transmission network and distribution network that have aged and have not been developed or maintained sufficiently.

In the next five years we will double down on our drive to **make the Western Cape energy resilient**, by empowering the private sector to invest in renewable energy sources.

The impact of not decarbonising the economy is that goods produced for export, using the existing energy mix, which is predominately fossil fuel based, will be subjected to a carbon tax, the extent of which could make our export products uncompetitive. So the need to turn to **renewable energy and in particular renewable energy based in the Western Cape, is critical**.

We are on track to make at least one **small town in the province load shedding-free**. With **Riversdale**, we want to show that energy security is possible outside of the major metros with their larger budgets.

We will continue to support the Electricity Minister and Eskom wherever they need it, but we will also **hold them accountable where they do not perform**. I have shared the frustrations of many residents these last few months with the slow response of Eskom to electricity faults, especially after major storms. I will keep the pressure on them to up their game and improve their services.

The **Western Cape Energy Resilience Programme has already seen 2 000MW of new energy** in development, and in **2023/24 alone we saw 743 MW of capacity** added to the province's power system.

Our drive towards an energy-secure future by bringing more independent power producers into the fold is being recognised by the likes of the National Energy Regulator (NERSA).

According to NERSA, 39% of the total investment value of new generation projects, amounting to over **R7 billion, registered from January to March 2024 is here in the Western Cape**. This has led to an installed capacity of 213MW. **Of the 105 new generation facilities registered, 1 in 5 (21%) are here in this province.**

Across our government, we are doing everything we can to cushion the impact of load shedding on critical services. From installing **energy-saving lights at schools, distributing thousands of load shedding relief packs to vulnerable residents and grade 1 and grade 12 learners** in our lower quintile schools, to ensuring **10 of our major hospitals are exempt from load shedding**, and launching an **electricity wheeling toolkit**, we have tackled this crisis from every angle.

It is also fantastic to see how some of our projects, made possible through partnerships, that are helping to keep services such as teaching and learning on track even when the lights go out.

Earlier this year I visited Cloesteville **Primary School** in Stellenbosch, the first school in the country to receive an Energy Performance Certificate after the University of Stellenbosch and a private company **partnered to install a 7.5kW solar PV system**. This school is not only ensuring education is delivered to its learners uninterrupted but is also making a difference to the environment.

No sector of society was immune to the impact of power cuts. Businesses, especially SMMEs, bore the brunt. But amid the worst of the Eskom load shedding crisis, the **Alternative Energy Support Programme offered support to SMMEs**. This programme has installed **12 solar backup systems at 12 municipal SMME trading hubs in 7 municipalities**, which include: Drakenstein, Stellenbosch, Cape Agulhas, Theewaterskloof, Laingsburg, Oudtshoorn and Mossel Bay.

Creating jobs through tourism

All our efforts in this government are ultimately aimed at enabling more jobs. And **tourism remains a key job enabler**.

No matter the season, through rain and sunshine, people are still choosing our province as a holiday destination. Tourist arrivals to Cape Town by air recorded a **remarkable 16% year-on-year increase between January and March 2024, reaching 336,268 visitors**. This not only shows a significant recovery but also surpasses the 2019 figure for the same period.

And Since September 2022 our Cape Town Air Access project has brought 7 new airlines and 7 new routes to Cape Town International Airport, which includes 4 new airlines and three new routes: Lusaka, Eswatini and São Paulo just in the last year.

For every **100 international visitors, the Western Cape gains R2.1 million in direct tourist spend, adds R500,000 to our GDP, and creates two local jobs**.

And our province's unique heritage plays a critical role in our tourism industry. On Friday, the 46th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee proclaimed **World Heritage status for three sites in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal**, as part of the South African nomination, 'The Emergence of Modern Human Behaviour: The Pleistocene Occupation Sites of South Africa.' The three sites are:

- Diepkloof Rock Shelter close to Elands Bay in the Western Cape
- Pinnacle Point Site Complex in Mossel Bay in the Western Cape
- Sibhudu Cave in KwaDukuza in KwaZulu-Natal.

While these sites will attract more visitors and celebrates our unique heritage, this accolade also represents a significant milestone in our **collective journey to preserve and celebrate the origins of modern human behaviour and our shared cultural heritage.**

A safe province is a prosperous province

For both our visitors and our residents, safety is absolutely essential. I am very proud of **our Law Enforcement Advancement Plan (LEAP) – a leading partnership with the City of Cape Town.** Since its inception, our courageous women and men who are deployed every day to some of our most crime-infested neighbourhoods across Cape Town work tirelessly to make other community members feel safer.

Armed with data, evidence, technology, and dedication, our **LEAP officers have made more than 34 000 arrests** – and counting.

Beyond Cape Town our Provincial **Rural Safety Units are on patrol in the Swartland and Overstrand** municipalities, with **K9 Units in the Swartland, Overstrand and Mossel** Bay regions. In addition, there are now **477 accredited Neighbourhood Watches** in the province, comprising **14 632 patrollers.** They are a vital part of our safety and security network.

To beat back crime, we need adequate resources, which remains a serious concern for me. Our colleagues in the South African Police Service in the Western Cape are not properly resourced. While the province's police-to-population ratio sits at around one officer for every 417 residents, below the national ratio of 1:435. When you drill down to station level the figures show a different picture. At Cloetesville Police Station the ratio is 1: 1281, in De Doorns it is 1: 988 and in Lwandle it is 1:958.

I am encouraged that provincial Minister of Police Oversight and Community Safety, Ms Anroux Marais, has had **positive meetings with Western Cape Police Commissioner Lieutenant-General Patekile and the national Minister of Police.**

But while I am pleased with these talks and the growing spirit of co-operative governance, I will not be satisfied until we see **decentralised policing, decision-making and allocation of resources** to the areas that need it the most.

Helping the most vulnerable in our province

And while we must do everything to fight crime, we also need to look at the conditions that our residents live in. Our Social Development Department is the **heart of our government.**

Where residents fall through the cracks of society, our hard-working social workers are there to catch them. For the most vulnerable it is imperative that we help them get back on their feet.

Earlier this month, the provincial Minister of Social Development helped to officially reopen the newly refurbished **Horizon Secure Care Centre** here in Cape Town.

It is one of **seven such facilities in the province** managed by the department that assists youth who have been in conflict with the law.

Beyond the five newly built classrooms, facilities for vocational skills training and recreational offerings – among other features - this centre represents the care and responsiveness our government shows for people who need help in getting their lives back on track.

The daily reality of far too many people in our province may not necessarily mirror the successes of our government.

The cost-of-living crisis has too many households in a vice grip. We may be creating jobs, but too many residents are not feeling the relief of these economic opportunities.

No one should go to bed hungry – ever. Through growth we create food security; by enabling communities we can feed our communities.

To boost food production at the community level, from 2019 to 2023, we supported **48 smallholder producers, 172 subsistence producers, and 3 308 households** in the production of food resources like food gardens.

Over this same period, we have dished up cooked meals to those in need, through **102 community nutrition and development centres and 358 soup kitchens** across the province.

At our schools, more than **500 000 vulnerable learners receive free meals each year** through the School Nutrition Programme.

As a team we have already agreed that the ministers of Health, Education and Social Development will work together to identify where there are gaps in our extensive feeding schemes and how we ensure that we **fight hunger with healthy, affordable meals**. We have to be innovative: for example, I have asked our Minister of Education to look at the possibility of sending learners, who are part of our school feeding schemes, home on a Friday with a food parcel for the weekend. Because so many of our learners get their last meal on a Friday and their next meal on a Monday morning.

Governing for our residents

While I criss-crossed this province earlier this year, too many of our residents spoke to me of the poor services they received from their municipality. There is a lot that we do as the Western Cape Government to **hold municipalities to account and to support them**, because it is at local government level that many vital services are delivered.

I have previously raised my frustrations with the slow and unwieldy process that we have to follow through **Section 139 of the Constitution** when local governments fail. I have been particularly vocal about the collapse that I am seeing in my **former hometown of Knysna**. While I deeply respect the independence of local government, we **cannot only intervene when everything is broken**. I have raised this issue with the national Minister, and I am going to keep raising the unnecessary barriers that stand in our way to deal with collapsing service delivery.

But while I am often frustrated, I am also **super proud of what our municipalities do**. In March this year the results of independent research institute, Good Governance Africa's 2024 Governance Performance Index, **confirmed that many Western Cape Municipalities** are by far the best performing in the country.

The index showed that:

- Cape Town is the best performing metro in South Africa, recognised for high standards of service delivery;
- The top 4 district municipalities in South Africa, in the category with no Water Service Authority, are ranked from the top: Cape Winelands, West Coast, Garden Route, and Overberg; and
- The best 3 local municipalities in South Africa are all from the Western Cape. Swartland (Best Small Town) is the top municipality in the country, followed by Drakenstein (Best Secondary City), and Saldanha (Best Large Town) in third place.

This reflects the years of investment in our local governments, and supporting them to serve our residents.

Conclusion

I feel such a sense of achievement and pride when I see government done right, and I believe we are doing that here in the Western Cape. But while we have set the bar high, we must raise it even higher.

Since the elections we have **met as a Cabinet and with Provincial Top Management** to set our **priorities for this term as a team**. I am excited by how the team is looking at the challenges we face and how we find **different ways of tackling pressing issues** – my colleagues in health and education in particular are looking at how we can meet the growing needs in these portfolios. The Ministers will now be working with their teams and looking at how we land those programmes and policies in the Medium-Term Budget Policy Framework in October and in the 2024/25 budget next February.

We spend days, nights, months, and years putting systems and people in place so that we enable our 90 000 teachers, nurses, doctors, road crews, and social workers to work for all the residents of the Western Cape, particularly the vulnerable who rely so heavily on government services.

We have done so much already. But **we cannot afford to rest and let our guard down**.

We must work harder than ever before, with purpose and determination, to ensure our province and citizens keep succeeding.

I have no delusions about the challenges that lie ahead or the crises we may face.

When I took the Premier's oath of office 5 years ago, I swore to **uphold and protect the dignity of all our residents**. This has not changed.

I have faith in our remarkable province and country; because I have seen firsthand what is possible when we work with purpose and dedication.

Let us **not squander** this moment in our country's history.

Let us show that the **centre can hold** against extremist forces on the right and left that seek to divide us and act in the interests of the minority, not the majority of our residents.

Let us **work together**, with renewed purpose and commitment in the service of the people of our beautiful country and province.