



MINISTRY  
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**REMARKS BY MINISTER VELENKOSINI HLABISA AT FW DE KLERK  
FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**THE RADISSON COLLECTION HOTEL, WATERFRONT, CAPE TOWN**

**03 FEBRUARY 2026**

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Programme Director,

Chairperson of the FW de Klerk Foundation, Mrs Elita de Klerk;

Deputy Chairperson, Ms Christina Teichmann;

Executive Director of the Foundation;

Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Mr Gregor Jaecke;

Auditor-General of South Africa, Ms Tsakani Maluleke;

Public Protector of South Africa, Advocate Kholeka Gcaleka;

Executive Deputy Mayor of Cederberg, Dr Ruben Richards;

Members of the Sonn family;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you at this important engagement, and I thank the FW de Klerk Foundation for the invitation and for convening this timely discussion.

This year marks a critical period in our democratic calendar as South Africa prepares for the next local government elections. For clarity and constitutional accuracy, the

government refers to 2026 as the year of local government elections, noting that elections must take place within 90 days after the expiry of the current municipal **councils' term**, which concludes at the end of October 2026. This constitutional certainty provides stability, predictability, and legitimacy to our democratic process.

From the government's perspective, I wish to state unequivocally that South Africa is ready for the 2026 local government elections. Working closely with the Independent Electoral Commission, all preparatory processes are on track. In December 2025, the Municipal Demarcation Board completed and handed over the ward delimitation process to the IEC, enabling the Commission to proceed with voting district alignment, operational planning, and the recruitment and training of election personnel. In the coming period, the IEC will publish the official election timetable, including voter registration weekends, further signalling institutional readiness to deliver elections that are free, fair, and credible.

While election readiness is essential, we must be frank about the state of local government in our country. Local government is not performing at the level our people deserve. Although some municipalities continue to function reasonably well under difficult circumstances, too many struggle with governance, financial management, and service delivery. The Auditor-General's reports consistently show that only a limited number of municipalities can account fully and transparently for the resources entrusted to them. Similarly, the volume and nature of complaints received by the Office of the Public Protector point to deep-seated challenges in the local government sphere.

Local government is the sphere closest to the people. When it functions well, communities feel its positive impact immediately. When it fails, the consequences are

equally immediate: an unreliable water supply, poor sanitation, inadequate road infrastructure, and insufficient basic services. This reality underscores why the government is finalising the review of the White Paper on Local Government, which is expected to conclude the Cabinet process by the end of March this year. This review seeks to reimagine and strengthen the local government system to ensure it is fit for purpose, sustainable, and responsive to community needs.

One of the central challenges facing municipalities is capacity, both political and administrative. Many municipalities were historically demarcated without a viable revenue base and remain heavily dependent on grants. Yet even where resources are available, insufficient capacity often prevents effective utilisation. Experience shows that municipalities that perform better are led by competent political leadership and supported by capable, professional administrations. Such leadership understands financial statements, engages meaningfully with audit outcomes, responds appropriately to reports of Chapter 9 institutions, and ensures that consequence management is applied fairly and lawfully.

As we approach the next local government elections, there is a critical opportunity for the electorate to play a decisive role. Voters are encouraged to assess candidates carefully, based not on sentiment or loyalty alone, but on demonstrated competence, integrity, and commitment to service delivery. Active participation in elections is essential. Abstention weakens accountability and allows decisions to be made by a minority. The most effective way to strengthen municipalities is for citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote for capable councillors who can provide political oversight and appoint competent municipal management.

Another major challenge confronting local government is instability arising from coalition politics. Following recent elections, many municipalities have been governed by coalitions or minority governments. Coalition governance is no longer an exception; it is a permanent feature of our political landscape. While coalitions reflect democratic pluralism, instability arises when they are poorly structured, lack shared principles, or are driven by short-term political manoeuvring. Frequent no-confidence motions, rapid leadership changes, and the absence of policy continuity have undermined service delivery in several municipalities.

Government is therefore advancing legislative reforms to regulate coalition governance at the local level, with the objective of promoting stability, transparency, and accountability. These reforms seek to ensure that coalition agreements are binding, that leadership reflects the electoral mandate, and that councils can govern consistently for a full term. The intention is not to advantage any political party, but to protect communities from perpetual instability and governance paralysis.

In this regard, the institutions in Chapter 9 play a vital role in safeguarding democracy and accountability. The IEC has demonstrated its institutional maturity and capacity to manage increasingly complex and highly contested elections. The Auditor-General and the Public Protector continue to strengthen accountability through independent oversight. These institutions are fundamental to maintaining public trust in democratic processes, particularly during periods of political transition.

A further opportunity lies in strengthening intergovernmental coordination through the District Development Model (DDM). The principle of “one plan, one budget” recognises that all government activity ultimately occurs within municipal wards. By aligning planning and budgeting across national, provincial, and local spheres, the DDM seeks

to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and maximise the impact of public resources. The government will shortly publish updated DDM regulations for public comment, with a view to finalising the framework by the end of March.

Finally, addressing the complex challenges facing municipalities requires partnerships between government, the private sector, and civil society. Climate-related disasters, infrastructure backlogs, and economic pressures cannot be addressed by the government alone. However, partnerships are only sustainable where there is sound governance, transparency, and accountability at the municipal level. Competent leadership creates the conditions under which such partnerships can flourish.

In conclusion, local government remains the foundation on which the state's functioning depends. Where municipalities work, communities thrive, and economic activity grows. Where they fail, the consequences reverberate across all spheres of government. The forthcoming local government elections present an opportunity, not a panacea, but a constitutional mechanism through which citizens can influence the quality of governance in their communities.

Let us therefore approach this period with seriousness, responsibility, and a shared commitment to strengthening democratic local governance. If every municipality works, South Africa will work.

I thank you.