

## MEDIA STATEMENT

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EMBARGO: NONE

### LOOK AHEAD AND MOVE WITH SPEED, BUT JUST MOVE

The SAOU noted President Ramaphosa's State of the Nation address for 2026. When heard in isolation and taken at face value, one would be forgiven for being overly optimistic about the future of South Africa. But unfortunately, ignorance of the past is a luxury the citizens of South Africa cannot afford.

What set this year apart is the encouraging successes of the past year. As mentioned, the GNU is proof that through unity of purpose and unity of action much can be achieved.

It is with this in mind that the SAOU wishes to express its cautious appreciation for the initiatives shown through the focus on early childhood development, literacy, numeracy and mother tongue education. The SAOU does not always agree on the method of implementation, but the baseline principles are a worthy pursuit.

Another noteworthy aspect is the broad acknowledgement of government failures, especially at a local level. An honest evaluation of service delivery shortcomings without undue reliance on excuses is refreshing. It is with the same cautious optimism that the intervention plans to be implemented in addressing these shortcomings is noted. Challenges with regard to basic services such as electricity, water and sanitation are issues that schools across the nation cannot and should not have to face.

The SAOU further welcomes the continued commitment to the professionalisation of the public service, especially with regard to the Public Service Amendment Bill's aim of preventing political interference in key public service appointments. Ensuring capable, qualified individuals are placed at the helm of public service institutions will go a long way in rebuilding the functionality of many national and provincial departments.

However, a key issue conspicuously missing in the address is the austerity measures currently in place within basic education leaving many a qualified educator unemployed in a system buckling under a chronic teacher shortage. Though there was extensive mention of infrastructure investment, very little to no detail was given on how basic education capacity issues would be addressed.

With the increased spending on ECD learners and the expanded registration of ECD centres one

must look to the not-so-distant future where those young learners will need to move into the later phases of their education.

The backbone of our education system, teachers, cannot continue to shoulder more and more burdens with no respite in sight. The dire shortage of teacher posts will eventually reach a breaking point with far reaching consequences.

The State of the Nation address, though designed to be inspiring, will have to be followed by tangible action, lest it serve as another footnote to empty promises.

The SAOU therefore wishes to echo the Presidents final remarks: "We have indeed turned a corner. Now we must look ahead and move with speed."