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President Thabo Mbeki delivers his State of the Nation Address in Parliament. He does this at the beginning of each year to announce government's Programme of Action for the year.

provinces. It ensures that matters concerning the provinces are discussed at national level. The Council does this by taking part in making the country's laws.

Members of the National Council of Provinces

The National Council of Provinces represents the nine provinces. The Council has 54 permanent members and 36 special representatives. Each province has an equal number of representatives in the Council. This includes the Premier of the province, or a person chosen by the Premier, as head of the representatives.

There are also representatives from the South African Local Government Association who come from the nine provincial

local government associations. They represent local government, but may not vote.

Each provincial group of representatives has one vote that is given on behalf of the province by the leader of the group.

Lawmaking role

The National Council of Provinces discusses, passes, changes, suggests changes to, or rejects Bills. They may start or prepare Bills on certain matters. Only the Minister of Finance may introduce a Bill to do with financial matters.

Debates and questions

Issues that are important to the provinces are discussed in the National Council of Provinces.

Members may ask cabinet ministers questions that must be answered in the National Council of Provinces.

The National Council of Provinces has Select Committees that do the same work for the Council as the Portfolio Committees do for the National Assembly.

■ Cabinet

Cabinet is made up of the President as head of the Cabinet, the Deputy President and ministers. The President appoints the Deputy President and Ministers. He may also dismiss them. He also appoints deputy ministers from among the members of the National Assembly.

- *Justice Mohale*

The Budget

One of Parliament's main functions is to discuss and pass the Budget. Every year, the Minister of Finance introduces the Budget in Parliament. It is discussed in committees and in the two Houses, and a vote is taken.

The Budget is an annual plan on how government will spend money to achieve its goals. It is the most important economic tool of government.

It:

- makes sure that the state has the resources it needs to do its work;
- creates conditions to speed up economic growth;
- clearly shows important things to be done by government.

A budget has two sides:

- revenue (income); and
- expenditure (money that will be spent).

Budgeting is about balancing the available funds with meeting the needs of the people.