

Home Affairs walks the talk on digital transformation

Madam Speaker,

Digital transformation provides our country with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leapfrog into the future.

While countries like Brazil, India and Estonia have long embraced digitalisation to overcome problems, South Africa has continued to use manual, paper-based systems dating from the previous century, and allowed digital platforms that do exist, to decay.

The Democratic Alliance therefore welcomes the President's embrace of digital transformation in his State of the Nation Address.

But this must include urgent regulatory reform to the monopoly held by the State Information Technology Agency, which suffocates technological innovation.

If this can be achieved, then the President's announcement creates an opportunity for our country to not only to leapfrog into the digital age, but also to harness digital transformation to achieve the apex priority of the Government of National Unity, which is to grow the economy and create jobs.

This is our opportunity to reengineer government itself, where all the paperwork, all the queues, and all the fraud is replaced by secure online systems, available "at a touch" – as the President aptly put it.

At the heart of achieving this, sits Home Affairs.

The key to digitalising government, is the creation of a user-friendly digital identity system that is biometrically secured against fraud.

Think of the possibilities.

A single, biometrically-verified digital ID for every person can eliminate fraudulent payments of social grants and NSFAS funding, make identity theft a thing of the past, create a secure digital wallet for IDs, passports, drivers' licences, educational certificates and other official documents, and enhance the power of the South African passport to gain visa-free access to more countries.

Madam Speaker,

These changes will not happen overnight.

But we are working flat-out to deliver *Home Affairs @ home* as quickly as possible.

In addition to building the first components for digital ID, over the next 12 months, the Department of Home Affairs, the Border Management Authority and Government Printing Works will pursue the following priority reforms:

- Firstly, and for the first time, we will introduce the option to have IDs and passports securely delivered to the doorsteps of our clients, in the same way that banks already deliver debit and credit cards.
- Secondly, we will engage with banks and retailers to dramatically expand the successful pilot project that delivers Home Affairs services in some bank branches.

This project works, but has been limited to only 30 branches for the past decade.

I now want to expand it to hundreds or even a thousand bank branches, to enhance access and inclusion and ensure that South Africans in both rural and urban areas can visit their local bank branch to get a new ID or passport.

- Thirdly, also as part of expanding access and inclusion, we are working to ensure that every person who is legally entitled to a Smart ID is able to get one, by fixing the IT block that currently still forces naturalised citizens and permanent residents to use the less-secure green ID books.

- And finally, as the President announced, we want to introduce an Electronic Travel Authorisation system to begin automating the visa process through Machine Learning and AI.

At the heart of these reforms is a mindset shift that recognises that data is the currency of the future – and that it is the individual that owns their own data.

It is your ID, your passport, and your child's birth certificate.

This means the job of government is not to act as a centralised gatekeeper.

Instead, just like the job of a bank is to secure your savings while still granting you access to your own money, Home Affairs is the custodian of data, and our job is to ensure decentralised, secure and efficient access for our clients to their own data.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge that South Africans are tired of empty promises.

That is why I conclude my remarks today with an announcement that shows how Home Affairs under the GNU is turning words into action.

Bright and early tomorrow morning, our brand-new digital portal for the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme will go live.

Through this portal, vetted tour operators will immediately be able to submit group visa applications to bring many more tourists from India and China to visit beautiful South Africa.

The process has been digitalised from beginning to end, and tourists will no longer fill out a single form, or stand in a single queue.

To illustrate the scale of this change: before TTOS was created, there were only two South African missions in China, and only two missions in India, to serve the 2.8 billion people living in those two countries who wanted to come as tourists to our country.

Going forward, tour operators will submit an online group application, and receive the outcome of their application digitally within three days.

Importantly, this system was built in-house, by harnessing the talent of the young people on Home Affairs' software development team.

I hope that, within a matter of weeks, Minister Patricia de Lille and I will be able to welcome the first airplane full of new tourists who would otherwise not have come to spend their money in South Africa.

For every twelve tourists on that plane, one new job is created for the people of our country.

This is Home Affairs demonstrating the power of digital transformation.

Our commitment is to delivery dignity for all, both by giving people access to our civic services closer to where they live, and by driving job creation through visa reform.

Because nothing on earth delivers dignity, like a job.

Thank you.