Transport is not only an economic and a social function, but also carries massive security responsibilities. Successive Constitutional Court judgements have affirmed this obligation and have pronounced on the responsibilities of the various organs of state in this regard. Most instructive is the ruling that directs that while the mandate for protecting citizens from crime vests with the police, the public transport operator has a concomitant obligation to take reasonable measures to ensure the safety of citizens in its operational environment. Most of these judgements have been about PRASA.

Our Ministerial Priorities over the term of the 6th Administration places the re-imagination of safety in transport at the centre of our service delivery model. We are under no illusion about our obligations to bolster security, while protecting the citizens’ socio-economic rights. Central to our efforts to re-imagine safety in transport, the end-user, being the citizen, is at the heart of our interventions. Ours is to ensure that citizens are safe from harm while using public transport. This is true of all modes of transport.

The PRASA intervention must therefore be understood within this context. This is the first in a series of intervention that will breathe life to a re-imagined approach to security.

In the past, in order for PRASA to fulfil its obligations to secure the passenger rail environment, it had to spend no less than R700 million in 2018/19. The security service was completely outsourced placing reliance on private security firms to bolster passenger security. Notwithstanding this huge cost, the interventions
have clearly not worked. In-sourcing of security is a critical building block in our integrated security strategy.

The re-imagined safety strategy is built on the foundation of a seamlessly integrated value chain that incorporates all the law enforcement and prosecution authorities and takes a holistic view of safety across modes. These include SAPS, the Hawks, the National Prosecuting Authority, Metro Police and the Railway Safety Regulator.

The prevalence of crime in our rail environment has reached alarming levels. Theft and vandalism of critical infrastructure in our railways not only place the lives and livelihoods of those who rely on trains in danger, but also have dire consequences on the economy.

The criminality that ravages our railway environment undermines our efforts to modernise our passenger rail system and deliver a service that is safe, reliable and affordable. When a cable is stolen resulting in delays, the worker who subsequently loses a job as a result may be your parent or sibling. When track is stolen, resulting in derailment, the commuter who loses a life may be your relative.

When stations get vandalised and burnt down, resulting in the shutting down of the line, the people who suffer the consequences are the poor who cannot afford the more expensive taxis and buses to get to work. Have we become a society of heartless criminals who have no regard for human life or the livelihood of those who live from hand to mouth?

Today, as we launch this PRASA Integrated Security Plan, we are saying, enough is enough. For too long we have been victims at the mercy of self-serving criminals who have no regard for others. We call upon communities and civil society at large to join us in eradicating this cancer in our rail environment.

Every day, we are confronted with horrifying images of damage and destruction of our infrastructure that require millions to rehabilitate. Every day, we are confronted with images of cables stolen from our environment. Our resolve to turn the tide and throw a book at these criminals has never been greater. We are equal to the challenge and confident that we will turn the tide as we take the war to these criminals.

We have been working tirelessly with our law enforcement authorities developing an integrated and seamless response to this challenge.

This plan is a product of collaborative effort with the Ministers of Police, State Security, Justice and Correctional Services as well as the National Prosecuting Authority. There will be no mercy for criminals who think they can continue stealing and vandalising public assets with impunity. We will throw the book at
them and ensure that they are charged with economic sabotage and rot in jail for many years.

The PRASA Integrated Security Plan we are launching today has been in operation since mid-August and has already recorded successes. In August, the SAPS and PRASA protection services arrested six (6) men in possession of copper cables and signalling equipment worth over R5.5-million. We are pleased that the number of arrests has been steadily increasing in the past few weeks. We will sustain the pressure to ensure that the long arm of the law reaches every corner where these criminals hide.

Our criminal justice system has also been responsive in ensuring that it becomes more difficult for suspects to obtain bail for these crimes. While we may not be able to disclose the detailed aspects of the plan, we assure South Africans that the plan is robust and will bring to book these criminals who are stealing from the poor.

Our integrated plan to police and secure the rail infrastructure is anchored on five (5) pillars. These are:

1. Intelligence gathering, analysis and coordination
2. Proactive approach
3. Combat approach
4. Reactive approach through detection
5. Communication and liaison

This is an intelligence-driven plan that will enable us to find these criminals wherever they hide, in their homes, in their communities, in their workplaces.

We have no doubt that our interventions will break the back of organised crime syndicates and bring the perpetrators to book. We will equally increase the visibility of SAPS and protection services officers at identified hotspots. Similarly, commuters will see more policing operations in the railway environment.

None of our efforts will yield tangible results if we don’t pay closer attention to the scrap metal industry and second-hand dealers. These are the people who create the market for the proceeds of crime. We will uproot those who continue to buy these stolen goods and fuel the illicit market.

As we tighten our grip in fighting this scourge, our strategy calls for prosecution-guided investigations and adherence to the principle of opposing bail. This has already proven to be a success in the recent matter of two current and former PRASA employees who were caught with the rail agency’s assets worth over R2-million. One of the accused, a current employee, was refused bail.
Underpinning this plan is our commitment to a compact with communities on the ground. We can only succeed if we work closely with communities and they play an activist role in protecting the public infrastructure. Our communities must take it upon themselves to expose these criminal networks within their own ranks.

This factor played a role in our decision to recruit the new protection officers from within the affected communities where it is possible. We must equally educate members of our communities that these are public assets that are critical in ensuring that people are able to commute to work and children are able to attend school in a safe and affordable way.

All South Africans must become partners in the protection of the public infrastructure as the citizens are the real owners of PRASA and its rail network. To this end, PRASA will work closely with all law enforcement authorities to ensure that we give practical meaning to the social contract with civil society, and ensure that the most severe penalties are imposed on those arrested.

I thank you