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Thank you very much MR President for convening us here at the citadel of power in our country after you found the most valued pen in the history of S Africa.

Today marks a historic milestone as we are here to witness the signing of the National Health Insurance Bill (NHI) into law, a transformative leap in our nation's health policy. This new law, derived from the aspirations of the National Development Plan Vision 2030, sets us on a course that

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enables us to guarantee that every South African will have the right to access comprehensive healthcare services, free at the point of use.

The vision of the ANC as the oldest and leading liberation movement for South Africa with regards to health starts as far back as 1942, as expressed in the African Claims document under the leadership of President DR AB Xuma, which even at that time already had an outline of the type of NHI that South Africa must adopt. One of the clauses of the document called for “ The establishment of free medical and health services for all sections of the population” while the other clause called for “ A drastic overhauling of the health services of the country with emphasis on preventive medicine “ . But the journey to today’s landmark moment essentially began in 1994 with the post-apartheid government's commitment to healthcare reform. Over the decades, numerous committees, inclusive of diverse professionals and stakeholders, have been diligently working to shape the future of our health system. Through extensive public consultations and after assimilating numerous comments, a Green Paper was developed, leading to a White Paper that laid the groundwork for the NHI Bill.

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Within our context, historically, healthcare costs have unfairly burdened the most vulnerable members of our society for an extended period. Families have faced agonizing decisions, having to choose between basic

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The final stage in Parliament required that National Council of Provinces through the Select Committee on Health to approve the B-Bill after further consultation in each of the nine Provincial Legislatures accompanied by 60 public hearings across the nine provinces. Subsequently, 'B-Bill' was approved on 06 December 2023 and the Bill was accordingly referred to His Excellency the President for consideration and assent.

We are happy that after many years of policy discussions and five years of the NHI Bill in Parliament, the National Health Insurance has now reached the starting line, which allows the department to commence with implementation and to create mechanisms for the equitable, effective, and efficient utilisation of the resources made available to the Fund to meet the health needs of the population.

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The Constitution empowers the President to set different dates for the effectiveness of various provisions within the Act. Therefore, the phased implementation of the various provisions in the Act will be undertaken with due consideration of the specific sections of the Act and when they are proclaimed as law. Without the accompanying regulations, directives, and operational procedures, the transformative impact of the Act cannot be realised.

Section 9 of the NHI Act serves as the initial point of action, establishing the National Health Insurance Fund as an autonomous public entity, as outlined in Chapter 6 , and listed in Schedule 3A, of the Public Finance Management Act. This provision requires the establishment of a Board and other governance structures, which are critical elements for accountability and oversight purposes.

The Act empowers the Minister to appoint a Board, but the process involves multiple conditions and steps, such as conducting public interviews, public nominations, shortlisting criteria, appointment of the chairperson, and requiring Cabinet approval. This being the inaugural Board, a comprehensive regulatory framework and transparent process to enable this is essential.

The Department has already been busy at work preparing Regulations as mandated by the provisions in Section 55. Accordingly, the Minister will publish these regulations for public comment, encouraging transparency and inclusivity in shaping the governance of the NHI Fund and its enabling structures. Once regulations are finalised, the Minister and the Department will proceed with establishment of the NHI Fund, a process expected to take between 6 to 12 months post-proclamation of the relevant sections of the Act, with subsequent phases involving additional regulations and implementation steps.

There will be challenges on the journey to the future and we will find obstacles and difficulties that will need to be confronted. This journey will take many years of concentrated and consistent work. It is a process and not an event and must be broken up into manageable phases and parts, each of shorter duration.

We are inviting every role-player to join us on this journey and to become a part of the solutions towards realising a just, equitable and sustainable

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health system that addresses the health needs of all our people irrespective of where they reside or what their socioeconomic status is. I am particularly calling on heal professionals and healthcare workers