

**ADDRESS BY DPWI DEPUTY MINISTER DURING THE OFFICIAL HANDOVER OF WELISIZWE
BRIDGES, ULUNDI, 27 JULY 2026**

Programme Director,

His Majesty the King Misuzulu ka Zwelithini;

Our Hosts: The Mayor of Ulundi LM & Zululand DM;

Mayors, Councillors, and Speakers;

Amakhosi nezinduna;

Leadership of the Department of Defence and Military Veterans;

Senior Government Officials;

The Community of Ulundi and surrounding areas;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) is pleased and honoured to be with the people of KwaZulu-Natal at the Ulundi LM in the Zululand DM to hand over Welisizwe Bridges.

This ceremony takes place during Nelson Mandela Month which honours the legacy of our liberation icon, human rights champion, and Founding President of a democratic South Africa.

Our nation observes Mandela Month under the theme, **"It's still in our hands to combat poverty and inequity."**

The theme is derived from Madiba's call to action 21 years ago to **"End Poverty Now"** on 3 February 2005 at Trafalgar Square, London.

Declaring that it is in our hands to end poverty and injustice, Madiba said, ***"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom."***

Since 1994 under former President Nelson Mandela, our country has been spearheading a programme of fundamental change to bring a better life for all.

This programme of transforming our country which began under Madiba prioritized rural development given the long history of rural neglect and the apartheid spatial legacy.

We have no doubt that today Madiba would be satisfied to see the democratic government in the 7th Administration prioritising rural infrastructure delivery in the form of Welisizwe Bridges.

Earlier today, we had the opportunity to appraise Indlulamithi, His Majesty King Misuzulu kaZwelithini, about the Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme.

In this regard, we wish to publicly convey our deep sense of gratitude for the warm reception that we received from His Majesty, the Royal family, and Advisors to Isilo.

Ladies and Gentlemen, under the leadership of His Excellency President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, government continues to lay a solid foundation of a just, equitable society that leaves no one behind.

This is a society that brings infrastructure and services to our rural communities which were neglected for many years during colonialism and apartheid.

During the Sixth Administration, President Ramaphosa spoke of the need for a dedicated focus on delivering rural infrastructure to enhance rural mobility to help children access schools safely during rainy seasons.

The Welisizwe Rural Bridge Programme is vital for fostering equitable rural development by enhancing connectivity and resilience in underserved areas.

Bridges serve as lifelines, enabling safe passage for people, goods, and services, which directly support education, health, agriculture, and economic integration.

It was during the 2022 State of the Nation Address (SONA), when the Commander-in-Chief of the SANDF, President Ramaphosa, mandated the Department of Defence to work together with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) to construct 96 low-cost bridges per financial year (FY) from April 2022.

In the Budget Vote of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure delivered on 23 May 2023, I announced that the budget for the programme for the MTEF is R3.8 billion.

To support localisation, SMME development, job creation, and transformation in the construction sector, we directed that construction material and bridge components must be sourced locally.

Today's successful delivery of the Ombimbini and Osuthu Welisizwe Bridges to the people of Ulundi and Zululand District Municipality marks a significant accomplishment in expanding the direct benefits of safe, reliable transport infrastructure, local economic development, and job creation

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Welisizwe Bridges programme was developed to respond to emergency situations in relation to river-crossings.

In 2020, Cabinet supported the Welisizwe Implementation Model and gazetted it in July 2020 through Infrastructure South Africa (ISA) as Strategic Integrated Project (SIP) No 25, a part of the Infrastructure Development Stimulus Package to boost the economy.

The successful implementation of this Strategic Integrated Project (SIP) became even more urgent after provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Northwest experienced floods leading to loss of life, destruction of infrastructure and disruption of life.

During floods, it is vulnerable, impoverished, rural communities that bear the harshest brunt of inclement weather and climate change, hence our government's determination to improve rural infrastructure.

Initially targeting 288 bridges by 2025/2026 across KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga, and Free State, the Welisizwe programme sought to enhance safe access to schools, government offices, clinics, and markets while reducing flood-related risks.

Nationally, as of April 2026, no less than 130 were completed with 48 under construction. This progress demonstrates significant socio-economic impact including job creation and skills transfer.

The bridges completed and those under construction represent effective intergovernmental cooperation and community-focused infrastructure delivery.

Plans are now well advanced in consultation with the Department of Transport for the submission of the Phase Two application.

This next phase will provide for the construction of additional rural bridges and the expansion of the Welisizwe programme to the Northern Cape, Western Cape, and Gauteng provinces which were not included in the first phase.

Compatriots, the Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme has delivered 41 completed bridges in KwaZulu-Natal to date, with Zululand District, the historic heart of the Zulu Kingdom, standing as the Programme's flagship district at 85% completion.

The Zululand District Municipality - spanning Abaqulusi, Ulundi, Nongoma and Uphongolo - has recorded the strongest delivery performance of any district in KwaZulu-Natal, with 11 of its 13 programmed bridges already completed.

The two outstanding bridges: Ingwe 1 and Ingwe 2 (pedestrian, Uphongolo Local Municipality), remain at the technical assessment stage under Phase C and forms part of the Department's recovery plan.

No less than R11-million (R11 739 226.10) was spent on the construction of the Osuthu Vehicular Bridge.

During the construction period of the project the employment of local labour was intensified to help alleviate poverty within the Zululand District Municipality.

161 jobs were created, and of these, 152 were EPWP, 5 were artisans, 2 special workman trainees, and 1 clerical. The 152 EPWP benefitted 61 females, 91 males, and 74 youth.

The Umbimbini Welisizwe Bridge costs no less than R15-million (R15 154 451.25). It employed 83 people where 73 were EPWP beneficiaries (33 males, 40 females, 34 youth), 5 were artisans, 2 trainees, 1 clerical, and 1 OHS officer.

Ladies and Gentlemen, since 1994, the democratic government has remained inspired by Madiba's ideal of creating a people-centred, inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

We extend our deep sense of gratitude to all our traditional leaders for working with our government to improve rural infrastructure and service delivery.

Let us continue working together to bring development in the villages where our people live.

We make an impassioned plea to amakhosi, izinduna, councillors, community leaders, and everyone to maintain and preserve this infrastructure for future generations.

It is in our hands to combat poverty and inequity!

Brick by brick, let us build the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa of our dreams.

I thank you!