

Phil Mnisi: Opening remarks - 2025 Post Budget Seminar

Opening remarks by Mr Phil Mnisi, Governor of the Central Bank of Eswatini, at the 2025 Post Budget Seminar, Ezulwini, 7 March 2025.

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- Programme Director,
- Honourable Minister for Finance,
- Members of both Houses of Parliament,
- Senior Government Officials,
- Panellists,
- Captains of Industry,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning!

It is with great honour and pleasure that I welcome you all to the 2025 Post-Budget Seminar hosted by the Central Bank.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to both the Ministry of Finance and Central Bank of Eswatini for investing their time and limited resources in this important discussion.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the purpose of this Seminar is to bring together stakeholders from all sectors of society to deliberate and brainstorm on the 2025/26 National Budget.

Our goal is to assist the Ministry of Finance and the Government to effectively execute the budget to deliver key services to the people of Eswatini.

We wish to commend the Minister for Finance once again for availing himself and agreeing to deliver the keynote address focusing on the highlights of his 2025/26 Budget Speech. We sincerely appreciate you Honourable Minister for taking time from your busy schedule to be with us this morning.

To our Panellists and distinguished guests, we hope you have all had the opportunity to familiarise yourself with the Budget to facilitate an interactive session with the Honourable Minister.

Programme Director, the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance recognize the importance of facilitating a Forum for professionals from both the public and private sectors to share their insight on the National Budget. This Seminar aims to create a platform for stakeholders to discuss key issues related to the Budget, ultimately helping to inform the Minister on how to effectively address these pertinent concerns moving forward.

Furthermore, the Seminar will provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share information in an open environment and your input is truly invaluable.

Honourable Minister, I would like to bring to your attention that a group of Panellists from the different spheres of society will share their insight on the budget. Their contributions are intended to reflect the sentiments of these sectors regarding the proposed budget. We appreciate them for honouring our invitation to be the lead discussants in this Forum.

The Panellists have been selected from various sectors, including the business community, civil society, international development partners, legislators and independent intellectuals.

Distinguished guests, you will recall that the Minister for Finance, delivered the National Budget for 2025/26 fiscal year to Parliament on 14th February 2025 themed "Transformation for Growth".

The budget was introduced as a Pro-growth National Budget that was developed through inclusive and comprehensive consultations with Emaswati (i.e. Chiefs, Members of Parliament, Tindvuna teTinkhundla, the community development council) across all four (4) regions of the country.

The budget aligns with His Majesty's Speech from the Throne delivered at the opening of the second session of the 12th Parliament, in which he declared 2025, as "A year of Transformation to the Promise Land".

In his speech, His Majesty urged the government to improve service delivery in several key areas, including, 'Health care', 'Education', 'Employment creation', 'Science and technology' as well as, 'taking care of the Elderly and the youth'. This call was a response to the "NKWE" commitment to address submissions made by the public during the Sibaya "peoples parliament".

Honourable Minister, it is unfortunate that post-tabling of the budget, we have seen a significant deterioration in external relations particularly the re-introduction of tariff barriers in trade by the US and withdrawal of external donor assistance. The latter in particular, will magnify public health challenges with closures of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the health space and a squeeze in support funding for the Government in its health programs. Lamentably, these changes come with increased job losses adding to the pool of unemployment and straining the economy further on social challenges. Consequently, the government will need to address a substantial funding gap, created by these external factors, to ensure the continuity of essential services for the people of Eswatini.

Conversely, these challenges galvanize Eswatini, and Africa as a whole, to seize transformative opportunities. They compel us to strategically diversify our partnerships, aggressively bolster domestic capacity, and champion a more decisive role in regional leadership. This juncture underscores the critical necessity for agile strategic planning and fortified resilience in navigating the complexities of an ever-evolving global landscape.

Programme Director, it is opportune for us to congratulate the Minister for Finance for his continued commitment to fiscal prudence, which has been recognised by the

Moody's Credit Rating Agency with an upgrade of Eswatini's economy credit rating from B3 to B2. This improvement is a testament to the government's ongoing efforts to make Eswatini a risk-free investment destination.

I would also like to congratulate the Government, on the monumental launch of the first external sovereign bond which was registered on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. This was truly a historic event for the country as it marked the issuance of its first international bond program.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am requesting you to be honest and constructive in your deliberations as this will help ensure that the Ministry receives sound advice on how to effectively implement the presented Budget.

As part of the Bank's responsibility to offer advice to Government, I wish to assure you, Honourable Minister, that we stand ready to provide the necessary support and guidance to your Ministry.

I THANK YOU ALL!