

TO: ALL MEDIA

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EMBARGO: NONE

MEDIA STATEMENT: MEC DHLOMO BIDS FAREWELL TO STUDENTS LEAVING FOR CUBA

The MEC for Health Dr. Sibongiseni Dhlomo has bided farewell to a group of twelve young students, mainly from poor backgrounds, who will be commencing their medical studies in Cuba.

This group of students, currently undergoing orientation at Durban's Marine Parade Garden Court, will join the 58 who are currently in Cuba through the South Africa-Cuba Joint Academic Programme. Since the launch of the programme, fifteen years ago; 155 students from Kwazulu-Natal have gone through the programme adding much needed numbers to the undersized cadre of medical doctors in the province's public health sector.

In June, a team of academics from Cuba visited the province to meet and discuss the programme with their South African counterparts as well as to celebrate fifteen years of the programme. Speaking to the students in Durban, MEC Dhlomo said: "We are very grateful for the continued partnership with Cuba which has not only produced excellent doctors but has allowed our young professionals to learn from one of the best health systems in the world."

He told students that they need to respect the Cubans and their way of life but most importantly "remember that you are our Ambassadors."

One student who will be leaving for Cuba is Mr. Mngadi (19) from uMkhambathini. He is the last born of five children who are cared for by a mother. "My mother works in the Expanded Public Works Programme, Zibambeleni, where they clean and repair roads. I take this opportunity with both hands and I now will realize my dream of becoming a doctor which seemed impossible because my mother would not have been able to afford university fees," said Mr. Mngadi.

The group is leaving for Cuba on the 20th of September 2011 and will be accompanied by MEC Dhlomo and other officials of the department. They will be in Cuba for six years after which they will return to join the South African public health for their internship and community service. "These students were recruited through our 11 district offices and we will make sure that on their return they serve the community from which they came," concluded MEC Dhlomo.

ENDS

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: KWAZULU-NATAL
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS**