

**Speech by MEC Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni on the occasion of
the graduation ceremony for the Traditional Healers at the
University of KwaZulu Natal
05 July 2006**

Prof Nceba Gqaleni

Prof W Sturm

US Consulate representatives: Mr Eugene Young and Dr Bill
Steiger

Ethekwini Mayor: Obed Mlaba

Ethekwini Municipality D. Manager: Ms S Skweyiya

Traditional Healers Council President: Mr SJ Mhlongo

Esteemed Academics

Our Graduates: **Makhosi!!**

Ladies and gentlemen

Its is a great honour for me to be called upon to pronounce a few words of congratulations as we today honour the Traditional Healers that are participating in the PEPFAR-funded project, entitled ***Biomedical and Traditional Healing Collaboration on HIV and AIDS.***

Our sincere gratitude goes to all those distinguished individuals and institutions that have made this beautiful day a reality.

Prominent among those we have to pay tribute to, would be our National Minister of Health, **Dr Manto Shabalala Msimang** who against all opposition was able to broach the subject of Traditional medicine to **President George Bush** when he visited our country.

I know that there would not have been any movement towards the realization of what we are celebrating today, had it not been for the committed staff of the **US Consulate** based here in Durban, who took up the issue and requested proposals.

My sincere gratitude also goes to the **Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine**, for allowing us; the uneducated to be schooled in their august and auspicious laboratories and to have our traditional healing prowess honed and developed to the level where it is today.

To the **Traditional Healers Council, the Mwelela Kweliphesheya Council, and all your members**, we are saying thank you for your perseverance and willingness to share with us, and the whole world, your mystic and ancestral gifts to heal and foretell.

We implore you to continue working positively with this progressive and true African university that is prepared to recognize your contribution in the health care provision of our people.

To all our staff members and professionals within the department of Health, particularly the Ethekewini Health Unit we are saying this collaboration is beautiful, let it continue unhindered and allow it to blossom, mankind as a whole will benefit.

As the KwaZulu Natal department of Health, we pride ourselves for having been fortunate to embrace the relationship with both the University as well as the Traditional healers bodies. As a department we have our own vision that seeks to provide optimal health status to all persons in this province.

We never at given time claimed to have a monopoly in the provision of health for our people. We instead have invited partnerships in the fight against the spread of the complex diseases that continue to ravage our communities, particularly those ailments we do not have a cure thereof.

We are thus thankful that alongside our attempts in this regard, there is collaboration between traditional healers and healthcare workers on HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment at community level.

It pains me ladies and gentlemen that this beautiful relationship we are cementing today, is not beautiful and straight forward to all the sundry, that we have to defend and explain it, why?

With this colourful ceremony today we are saying, we are not going to be deterred. **Paul Gauguin** understood it better when he said:

'It is the eye of ignorance that assigns a fixed and unchangeable colour to every object; beware of this stumbing block.'

The reality of our situation, as depicted by Minister Manto Shabalala Msimang, is that more than 70% of the South African population uses Traditional Healers. This is not surprising, as Traditional healers themselves say, as individuals, on average they attend to plus minus **2000** patients a year.

We are asking, why the stigma? The traditional healers themselves, given a choice, would like to ply their trade proudly during the day. Kanti koze kube nini singavunyelwe ukuqhakambisa amakhono ethul!

Wonke umuntu uyathanda ukusebenza kukhanya. Yini kufanele siye kubalaphi ebusuku engathi siyathakatha.

Kwamanye amazwe, kubalwa o India kanye no China imithi yendabuko iyasetshenziswa njengaloku seyize yathunyelwa nakwamanye amazwe kubalwa nalo leli—iyatholakala manje emakhemisi. Yini eyakithi kufanele ifihlwe.

Njengaloku sekukhona ukusebenzisana nabezemfundo ephakeme, nathi belaphi masibhekelele ukuthi indlela esisebenza ngayo yileyo engezukwehlisa isithunzi sethu. Kuyinhlanhla enkulu ukuthi sithole inhlango e fana ne PEFPAR ezimisele ngokusixhasa ukuze sizokwazi ukuzithuthukisa.

We are very thankful to PEFPAR for the 700 000 US Dollars already spent and the 1,2 million pledged for the coming year.

As a department we also pledge our full support for the good work being carried out in this university. I am particularly proud of the fact that this program for the first time gives us a tracking mechanism since all Traditional Healers Practitioners will be continuously looked after. I am particularly impressed by the program components, which include the following:

- The Development of a Demographic database of participating Traditional Health Practitioners, including their locations, contact information, practice details, referral networks, and educational and training background.

- Advanced HIV and AIDS Awareness Training, integrating the latest scientific information with innovative teaching methods.
- The development and use of new patient record forms, patient follow-up forms, and bi-directional referral forms by the Traditional Health Practitioners.
- The development of an effective bi-directional referral system between the public healthcare clinics of the District and Municipal Health System and the Traditional Health Practitioner's c practice sites.
- The collection of pertinent data from the Traditional Health Practitioners on a bi-weekly basis by the monitoring and evaluation team of data monitors (from the Medical School), and the compilation and analysis of this data for purposes of the Project by Data Analysts and Project management.
- Introductory, modified Home Based Care training combined with the supply of modified Home Based Care medical kits for use by the THPs at their practice sites and during home visits to their clients.
- Introductory VCT training in preparation for full SETA-approved Counseling and VCT training.
- Continuous Engagement on regular updates for and continuous monitoring and collaboration with those THPs participating in the project by the Project team.

Bathandwa bethu; Makhosi; ngiyangxusa ukuthi silibambe ngezandla zombili lelithuba kodwa singadedeli zonke izimfihlo zethu.

Seloku kwathi nhlo abalaphi bendabuko basebenzisa amakhambi abawathola ezintweni ezitshaliwe, ezivela emhlabathini. Qaphelani ukuthi nayo manje imithi yaseNtshonalanga nayo isibheke lapho namhlanje, ngakhoke masibambisaneni ngokuthelelana ulwazi kodwa singaludlulisi ngendlela ezoba yingozi kithi njengabantu abansundu.

We pray that the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine will act as a shield in providing Protection of Intellectual Property Rights and Traditional Medical Knowledge for our trusting people in this century for Africa.

To both the School of Medicine as well as to the funders under the auspices of PEPFAR, we are saying congratulation for the good work done, we looking forward to the completion of this program when all the estimated 400 Traditional Healers would have been trained. Only through hard work and perseverance, we will succeed as **Frederick Douglas jr.** pointed out in his Autobiography:

'There are those who profess to favour progress yet deprecate agitation. These are people who want crops without ploughing the field. They want the rain without thunder and lighting and the ocean without the roar of its many waters.'

Phambili ngomzabalazo wokulwisana nokubhebhetheka kwengculazi!

I thank you.