

Speech by KZN Health MEC Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion of the launch of the SANDF (KZN) and Department of Health Partnership Programme

13 November 2007

I regard this meeting as a very important milestone and a progressive development, not only for our province but also for the country at large.

I truly respect and appreciate this association as at the end it is our people who will benefit as we bring in together our time, expertise, compassion and intellectual capital.

The reality of the situation is that our country as well as the rest of our continent is experiencing a shortage of Health clinicians as well as a shortage of health facilities where people can be treated in areas close to where they reside.

On our own, as a department, we have long spelled out that we really cannot cope. As a point in illustration, I have just been to SCOPA in the Legislature where we had to answer why the Alexander Police Station mortuary is in such a dilapidated state. The irony of the situation is that as a Department we took over the running of this facility only this year. The same may be said about prisoners who need health care services and my department is always called upon to answer when there are shortages.

Fellow countrymen what all this means is, redressing the imbalances of the past and correcting all that was inhumane, necessitates that we all hold hands together and get involved.

We are saying, with the medical personnel you have, can we work together for the attainment of our noble vision which is to provide an optimal health status and quality health-care to all persons in the province of KwaZulu Natal.

I am cognisant of the fact that our situations are a little different as your mandate is limited to providing a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, military health service that is to ensure a health military community and combat ready forces in this province.

We all know that before 1994 our country went through a long period of poor provision if not total denial of quality health care to the majority of our citizens

The situation we are faced with is compounded by the fact that a majority of our population is not covered by Medical Aid

schemes and that the rest of the population solely depends and relies on the public health care institutions for their ailments, diagnosis and survival.

The advent of democracy has come with its own price as almost everyone now knows that health is a human right. As a progressive and caring government we have also committed ourselves to provide:

- Free health care for pregnant mothers
- Free health care to the children under 5 years
- Free treatment for sexually transmitted infections
- Free testing and treatment of Tuberculosis, as well as
- Free testing on HIV and AIDS, and free provision of Antiretroviral drugs.

Our situation is also compounded by the rising rate of unemployment that has given rise to poor socio-economic conditions that are hotbeds for the spread of communicable diseases and re-emerging diseases.

As the MEC for Health in this province, I have taken a decision to assist and nurture the creation of this relationship and work towards eliminating whatever pitfalls may come its way.

As a way forward, I recommend that the South African Military Health Service and our Legal Department as well as officials work on the Memorandum of Understanding that will clearly provide the lines of communication and also provide a clear picture of what our

interventions are and what agreements are required to make this relationship a living one.

For this mutual beneficial co-operation, as the political head of the department I commit to be instrumental in the removal of frustrations, challenges and complexities that may hinder us.

I just hope and pray that the process we are beginning this afternoon will succeed and serve as a blueprint model for the rest of the country to follow.

WORKING TOGETHER SIDE-BY-SIDE WE INDEED - WITH FORTITUDE AND COMMITMENT – SUCCEED TO FIGHT DISEASE FIGHT POVERTY AND GIVE HOPE TO ALL OUR PEOPLE.