

Speech by KZN Health MEC Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion of the University
of Zululand Academic Summit
4 September 2008

Revolutionary greetings to all of you.

We have responded positively to your invitation because rightfully so, we regard you as future leaders of this land. Our beloved late President, **Comrade Oliver Reginald Tambo** told us that: *'A country, a movement, a people, that does not value its youth, does not deserve its future'*.

We also came because your leadership under the guidance of the capable Dr Rachel Gumbi stand firm behind your wholesome upliftment and development. Even though this institution was established along tribal lines, we are proud of its history as evidenced by the caliber of leaders it has produced, for instance; Minister Jeff Radebe; the late Umkhonto weSizwe Commissar, Sihle Mbongwa, the late intellectual and soldier Mzala Nxumalo and Comrade Blade Nzimande to name a few.

We are also very perturbed that in this day and age, you are still experiencing same problems that curtailed our scope of understanding then, that is, in as far as career guidance and further career pathing is concerned. We are just glad that you are raising these aspects so that as responsible leaders, we can have a re – look of what is on offer vis-à-vis the requirements of both the industry and the nation. We are here to respond precisely because we cannot abdicate from our duty *to assist, guide, protect and empower young people with knowledge and coping skills on how to deal with daily challenges facing them.*

As a nation, the reality of the situation is that we are dependent on you for the success and attainment of the objectives that we have set for ourselves. You will be surprised how much each of you is needed by the very Department of Health regardless of the career path you are currently pursuing. As a Department, we

are not just about bandages and syringes; our scope of requirements is very wide. We embrace all disciplines thus needing personnel that will help the Department in its constitutional mandate to:

- Improve governance and management of the National Health System
- Promote Healthy Life Styles
- Contribute towards Human Dignity by Improving Quality of Care
- Improve Management of Communicable Diseases and Non-Communicable Illnesses
- Strengthen Primary Health Care, Emergency Services and Hospital Service Delivery Systems
- Strengthen Support Services
- Human Resource Planning, Development and Management
- Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring and Evaluation
- Prepare and Implement Legislation
- Strengthen International Relations

The reality of our situation is that we are in the province that is confronted with a burden of disease, which includes high levels of communicable and non-communicable diseases from the XDR TB ravaging our communities to the HIV and AIDS related maladies maiming and demising our best. We thus guarantee employment to all those who want to make a positive contribution in the attainment of a Better life for all.

As a country that is fully recognized and assimilated to all global bodies, we have a bigger responsibility whereby in few years to come we will be expected to report on progress made in the attainment of **Millennium Development Goals** and in this instance, those **relating to Health**:

- Halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger
- Reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality ratio
- Reduce by three-quarters the Maternal Mortality Ratio

- Halve and begin to reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS

For the realization of all the above, we are fully reliant on all our stakeholders including this very university. Student and youth organizations have a crucial role to play. Noting that today's invitation was extended to us by the South African Student Congress and the ANC Youth League, I feel comfortable to remind all that at the Polokwane Conference, it was stated that 'education and health must be prioritised as core elements of social transformation.' Within these faculties, we are expected to raise the level of awareness, human rights, democracy and patriotism and also ensure that we produce well informed and active citizenry. As a nation we cannot prosper if illiteracy is the order of the day; same if we neglect the health needs of our citizens.

You may then ask, what commitments the Department of Health is involved in, in order to alleviate people's conditions.

This is what you should know and please do pass it on to others:

For all the students who reside in this Province and who are prepared academically and psychologically to service the health needs of our people, this is what we do:

- Annually we issue out bursaries that average at R65 000 per student.
- This year alone, we have 541 KZN Department of Health Bursary holders. This is minus 55 students who failed in 2007 but who will be assisted again next year should they be promoted to the next level.
- Our selection criterion is determined by the requirements of each of our 11 Districts who will know how many and what category of qualified health personnel is needed where and when.
- Applicants will be required to provide proof of household income which should not be more than **R120 000** per annum.
- In the 2008/2009 financial year we have put aside a total budget of **R 46, 7 million** for your bursary requirements.

- This offer is available for students from KwaZulu-Natal who would, upon completion of their studies, be willing to work in their own communities.
- In this University alone, in 2006 we sponsored 48 students, in 2007 they were 40 and this year we are helping 53.

We have not put any stringent policies to those we assist, yours is just to pass. We also want you to regard the bursary scheme as part of our Department's endeavour to attract young people to healthcare services and to provide much needed financial assistance to the thousands of young people whose parents cannot afford tertiary fees.

Over and above that we ask you to inform those at home that do not have a University entry mark that we also recruiting matriculants for training as Basic Emergency Care Practitioners. This domain we reserve for those who would never have an opportunity to attend the institutions of higher learning. Requirements here are Matriculation Certificate; Code 10 Drivers license plus a Public Drivers Permit.

As responsible and patriotic citizens we require of you to always put forward the plight of those in anguish and in need of your expertise and guidance. We decry the uncaring attitude that our people are subjected to by some of those already practicing in our institutions. At times we feel that in your curriculum, **ubuntu** ethos should be taught as a subject.

Now that we have met, know that from you we expect a cadre who will always be willing to:

- Carry out your profession with pride and dignity.
- Serve the population with professionalism and care.
- Let your decisions be guided by the principles of Batho Pele, that says:
 1. serve the public in an unbiased and impartial manner in order to create confidence in the health service;

2. be polite and helpful when dealing with the public and treat them as customers who are entitled to receive high standards of service;
3. have regard for the concerns and circumstances of the public when making decisions;
4. be committed to the development and upliftment of all South Africans

I am more positive talking to you as I know that you belong to progressive structures. I am also mindful of the fact that as required by our long fought democracy, you have to elect leaders for your student formations and for that I invite you to heed **Cde Zweli Mkhize**' clarion call, that of *Making the ANC a home for all*. Lead here and lead when you go out there, our people need to be enlightened more than ever before.

As a parting shot, know that good things come to those who truly wait. Heed our messages and advice when we say, ABSTAIN!

- We are saying to all those who have started engaging in sexual practices, it is not too late to reverse your actions; abstain!
- To those who have not started, please delay and postpone until you are more mature and responsible enough to cope with the consequences of your choice, actions and decisions.

Know that abstaining is cool nowadays because it guarantees you the following:

- It is the only 100% effective way to avoid having a baby and being infected with HIV.
- It assures you of good academic performance and achievement of future goals
- It provides you with clean bill of health free from sexually transmitted infections
- It allows you to make informed choices, and most of all;

- It takes removes you out of social, physical and psychological abuse.

Zithandeni bantwana bami, nisebenzise amathuba afike nenkululeko. Yisikhathi senu lesi.

I wish you success in your studies and hope you will make good citizens.

I thank you.