

**Speech by KZN Health MEC Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion  
of the PRO workshop at Elangeni Hotel, Durban**

January 14, 2009

Chairperson,

Leader of the Independent Electoral Commission in KwaZulu-  
Natal, Mr. Mawethu Mosery

Hospital CEO's present,

Distinguished facilitators and Public Relations Officers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to join you. The choice of hosting this workshop for our officials is indeed farsighted. The role of the Public Relations Officers, and all public servants I may add, is crucial in many of the key democratic issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the last months our government issued its 15 Year Review. The report critically assessed the way that our government is

organized, finances development, and delivers to the majority of the poor.

It documents a number of failures and shortcomings that have left the status of our people dangerously out of balance.

The report found striking inequalities in developmental outcomes, in access basic human needs, and in what people have expected over the years. Let me give some examples.

Differences in life expectancy between the rich and poor are now greater than 20 years.

Of the thousands of women who will give birth this year, many more will receive medical assistance whatsoever during childbirth and the postpartum period, protecting their lives and that of their infants.

With the costs of health care rising and systems for financial protection in disarray, personal expenditures on health now push more people below the poverty line each year.

This is a very bitter irony. At a time when the international community supports health as a key driver of economic progress and a route to poverty reduction, the costs of health care are themselves a cause of poverty for many of the people.

We are experiencing this reality in the face of steady progress and promising trends experienced since the start of this century. These trends and realities show us the two sides of globalization, a bright side and a very dark one.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that the country, as it stands now, is in balance in matters of deepening the democratic principles as never before. This year's National Elections support my conviction.

Fifteen years ago we launched a path that ushered the route to democracy for all. This was a conscious effort to tackle huge, and largely avoidable, differences in the social status of our people. The 1994 breakthrough put democratic institutions on the agenda for development and progress for the first time.

Today, we are here to enlist you in the effort for building a better life for our people. Never again should the gap between the rich and poor be a characteristic feature of where we live, what services we receive and what jobs we do. Never before has our country possessed such a sophisticated arsenal of tools, skills and technologies for cursing underdevelopment and backwardness.

We are doing more, better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here to remind you of your fundamental responsibilities to ensure that our people – irrespective of their socio-economic position – are able to enjoy the fruits of our freedom.

In your portfolios as Heads of Health care institutions; as Public Relation Officers, we are appealing to you to ensure that everyone has the information and opportunity to exercise their

democratic rights. Make our institutions centres for democracy. We are not going to tolerate untoward tendencies that seek to sabotage the IEC from doing its work.

**Remember, you are public servants who are expected to articulate government policies not debate them. You are not to use the opportunity and resources of the department to advance your political aspirations and agendas! The Public Service Act and Regulations thereof are still in force!**

Let us all co-operate with the IEC especially in its quest to register all the eligible voters early next month.

Always keep in mind that you are also citizens with equal rights and obligations to deepen and defend our democratic achievements. Ensure that you have registered to vote so that you can educate other people to register and also vote during the Election Day.

Democratic systems will not automatically gravitate towards greater fairness and efficiency. This country will not become a fair place for all by itself. Deliberate actions are needed; it also shows what needs to be done.

As the Head of the Department, I have also discussed with Honorable MEC Nkonyeni a request that we have for the IEC that they allow our staff especially the Doctors and the Nurses to exercise their vote during the days set aside for special voting so as to minimize disruptions on patient care.

With so much at stake for our people, let us all hope that the time will have the impact it deserves. I wish to close by quoting from the Holy Book; **Ecclesiastes 9:11**

*“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”*

Thank you.