

**Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration of St Antony's Home at Blaawbosch in Newcastle**

**26 October 2013**

Programme Director – Mr. Xolani Majola

Newcastle Municipal Mayor – Cllr Afzul Rehman

Omama ababheke izingane

St Antony's Home beautiful children

Programme Director, I feel so privileged and humbled to be part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration of the existence of the St Antony's Children's Home. I am also glad that you deemed it appropriate to invite me to grace this event as St Antony's Children Home has always had a soft spot in my heart.

The first time I got to know about this place was during my tenure as the Mayor of this beautiful town in 1996.

Programme Director, it was with awe that I learnt of the selfless contributions; dedication and love given by the childless Dr Khoza and his wife to the 5 children whose dying mother had asked the couple to take care of them. This marked the seed and beginnings of what we now know as St Antony's Children Home. 50 years of love, of caring and of hope.

To Dr Khoza and his wife; to Fr.Pacificus - Parish Priest at Dannhauser at that time and to all the departed Sisters and teachers who over the years made orphans here feel belonging and gave them hope and reason to live – we say – May their beautiful souls rest in eternal peace. **Ella Wheeler Wilcox**, the writer, to all of us says:

*'There is no chance, no destiny, no fate, that can hinder or control the firm resolve of a determined soul.'*

Believing in what Wilcox says, I also felt compelled to do what I did in 1996 which was to initiate and setup a Bursary fund for the children of this Home.

Programme Director, in 2010 when I visited this Home again, I was reduced to tears when I met Mandla Khoza who was once an orphan here, now a qualified teacher and above it all – married with children of his own. He qualified as a teacher because of the Bursary scheme we had initiated.

Looking at this place today I am proud that it has produced and nurtured a lot of Mandla Khoza's. There are a host of determined and strong willed men and women who making a positive contribution to the development of this country whose lives and hopes were shaped by this Home.

Allow me to remind you that in 2010 when I came here I made two requests. One was to the members of the community to choose one weekend where families would take out all the children here and treat them as their own in their respective homes; this as a means of relieving the mothers who are here every day to be with their own families as well.

Secondly, I asked the 87 children who were here in 2010 not to lose hope but to grasp the opportunities offered here and above it all to grow up to have families of their own and be good parents to their children despite the fact that they grow up without parents.

Today as we get closer to the festive season I would again like to request the parents in the community to just for one weekend ensure that this centre is closed and all Mothers working here be free to be with their own families. What I am asking for is for parents to just for a weekend to explain to your own children to take a back seat and allow these deserving and well groomed orphans to feel like kings and queens in the warmth and comfort of your homes. **Nelson Mandela** once said:

*'There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children.'*

Programme Director; at this juncture allow me to also express my 2013 request to the children here. Dear children, I implore to endeavour to concentrate on mathematics and science that would make it easier for you to pursue Health related courses so that you may access bursaries we offer as a Department of Health. Believe you me, through our Bursary scheme, we have selected children from Nquthu; Blaawbosch and deep rural settings and sent them to Cuba to study Medicine. Our first choice in this scheme is people like you.

Fellow compatriots, the time has come to make every citizen to reap the fruits of our liberation. Let us learn to embrace, protect and develop one another so that all of us can feel and say: **South Africa is a much better place than it was in 1994.**

Working together we can ensure that no single person goes to sleep without a meal; that we increasing participation in sports and recreational activities; improve priority skills base and develop the spirit of activism and patriotism to decrease incidents of all social ills that currently beset our communities.

I sincerely wish this institution and all its inhabitants a very bright future.

I thank you