

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MRS EDNA MOLEWA ON THE OCCASION OF FREE STATE PROVINCIAL SUMMIT ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE, JACOBSDAL-FREE STATE PROVINCE

Monday, 25 October 2010

Programme Director, Mr Gert Kruger Honourable MEC for Social Development, Mme Sisi Ntombela, Mayor of Xhariep District Municipality, Councillor Mntwanambi, Members of the Central Drug Authority here present, Local councilors, community and religious leaders of Jacobsdal, Parents and young people of Jacobsdal, Comrades and friends

Ladies and gentlemen
Goeie more.

Thank you very much MEC Mme Ntombela for the generous words of introduction. From the outset I would like to commend the Free State provincial government and the Department of Social Development in particular, for taking up the challenge to wage a war on the scourge of substance abuse which threatens to reverse the achievements of our democratic government.

Today's event is part of our government's broader campaign to confront the growing phenomenon of substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking head-on. We cannot fold our arms and be passive when drugs cause irreparable damage to our families and communities, hence the theme of this campaign: **"No place for drugs in my community"**.

Ladies and gentlemen, the magnitude of the drug problem in our country is a major concern for our government. Justifiably so, if you read the United Nations World Drug Report of 2009 it becomes apparent that the abuse of hard drugs such as heroine, crack/cocaine, methamphetamine ("tik" or "nyaope"), amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and ecstasy has indeed reached unacceptably high levels. Several studies, including those conducted by the Medical Research Council reveal shocking findings:

- Up to 30% of general hospital admissions in South Africa are directly or indirectly related to alcohol use
- 48% of trauma patients admitted to the casualty department of the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto on a Saturday night were found to be intoxicated
- Almost 80% of all assault patients - both male and female - presented at an urban hospital Trauma Unit in Cape Town were either found to be under the influence of alcohol or injured because of alcohol-related violence
- Over 50% of non-natural deaths received at state mortuaries in Cape Town alone had high levels of blood alcohol concentrations.
- 60% of pedestrians involved in collision traumas on the road and then treated in a hospital trauma unit were found to have high blood alcohol concentrations
- 67% of domestic violence in the Cape Metropolitan area was alcohol related.
- In a study of women abused by their spouses, 69% identified alcohol/drug abuse as the main cause of conflict leading to the abuse

Ladies and gentlemen, the far-reaching implications of substance abuse in our society should not be underestimated. It is touching the roots of our society—it ruins the life of our young children, influences gangsterism and other criminal activities, contributes to the spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS, poverty, domestic violence and other forms of abuse, and in fact, every facet of our social fabric. Substance abuse has thus become a threat to the future of our society and it necessitates our urgent attention.

What is even more frightening is the fact that our children are in the forefront of drug abuse. Mrs Carol du Toit from the Central Drug Authority (CDA) gave us a sober reminder during the youth dialogue that children, as young as eight years old in Durban and other parts of the country are becoming more and more involved in abusing drugs.

Without any doubt, the phenomenon of substance abuse has reached alarming levels. There is no reason to believe that this problem will be resolved or contained in the near future, if we do not take collective action now. We have to act with determination now to put an end to substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking. Yesterday, Deputy Minister Dlamini called on all of us to “view the drug and alcohol problem not just as a social and health problem, but as a matter that has the potential to threaten our stability and success as a nation”.

It is for this reason that our government has launched the national campaign which places particular emphasis on educating and mobilizing South Africans from all walks of life. With this campaign, our government aims to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent in our society. No individual, family or community is safe where alcohol abuse and illicit drugs take control. This campaign's goal is to inspire our people and mobilize community support for a drug-free society.

Ladies and gentlemen, experience has shown that successfully combating the drug problem requires the application of three elements harmoniously, in an integrated and balanced manner. These are supply reduction through law enforcement, demand reduction through prevention strategies amongst others, and harm reduction through treatment and social support. These three elements form the key pillars of the Prevention of and Treatment of Substance Abuse Act. The Act provides hope as it will substantially improve the manner in which the country responds to drug and substance abuse. We remain optimistic that with co-operation from all communities and sectors, we can begin to stem the tide of substance abuse.

I would like to emphasize that our government has made sure that the issue of substance abuse and illicit drugs receives priority. We have established the Central Drug Authority, which in partnership with the civil society and other structures of our society is responsible for developing programmes and strategies to deal effectively with this problem. We need to augment on these initiatives. These include highlighting the dangers of substance abuse through public awareness programmes such as the door-door campaigns that we conducted last week as part of the build-up activities to this summit. This summit is very important as it is part of the overall quest of our government and society as a whole to build a better life all, especially for the youth. Young people are the backbone of the social, economic and political development of any nation, particularly South Africa. It is mostly the youth that are affected negatively by this scourge. Public awareness on this issue should be intensified in a more targeted, aggressive and sustained way. We need to collectively work together to help our youth to turn the tide against a false and dangerous consciousness which glamourises the use of alcohol and drugs.

Young Free Staters, this campaign is about you and how together we can help you abstain from drugs. We know it will not be easy at times – friends and other peers will encourage you to begin smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol or sniffing glue. Without confidence, skills and support needed to resist these pressures, additional pressure will be applied on you to try marijuana,

methamphetamines and other drugs. Parents and other influential people in your lives cannot be with you at all times, thus you must also make the commitment to resist the temptation to experiment with drugs.

Parents and community leaders, let us empower our young people with life skills to be smart enough to say: “**Ke moja-I’m fine without drugs**”. Let us remember the old Sesotho saying: *lore lo ojwa lo sa le metsi!* Much more must be done to prevent our young people from falling into the claws of illicit drugs. This is not just the responsibility of government. We all have shared responsibility to act—that is why we are calling on you to join this national campaign. As parents it is our duty to prepare them to face situations involving drugs by equipping them with the right kind of social and personal skills to make the right decisions.

Through partnership with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) has established a toll-free substance abuse helpline. The toll-free number is: **0800 12 13 14** or alternatively you can send a short message (SMS) to **32312**. This line and SMS offer support, guidance and help for people addicted to drugs and alcohol as well as their families throughout South Africa. You have my personal assurance that if you call or send a message to these numbers, the organization would be happy to hear from you and offer assistance in any way it can.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is usually in the most vulnerable communities such as Jacobsdal (Free State), Rosedale (Northern Cape), Duncan Village (Eastern Cape) and many other impoverished communities where one finds higher levels of alcohol and substance abuse. We therefore need to understand the dynamics of substance abuse in poor communities and the role that poverty and deprivation plays in driving substance abuse. Poverty and inequality are major factors in contributing to substance abuse. However, I want to emphasize that we should note that the overwhelming majority of poor people do not turn to drugs and alcohol to survive. Whilst we might understand this, it can never be accepted that substance abuse is an acceptable alternative survival strategy if you are poor. It only leads to further poverty.

One prominent question that we need to address is whether the abuse of alcohol and drugs enhances or improves our ability to meet our primary challenge; to live each day to the best of our ability. Honest reflection about this issue yields only one answer: that drug abuse in no way contributes to the improvement of the individual, the family, the community or the society.

It therefore needs to be confronted with a sense of urgency and decisiveness by all members of our society. We need to forge a strong partnership with all sectors of our society to focus on rebuilding the family as the basic unit of society, on creating communities with strong moral values, on creating communities that will resist the temptations substance abuse bring, so that we can forge the kind of society that will bring a better life for all. In this regard, I am glad to report that the National Development Agency (NDA), whose mandate is to contribute towards poverty eradication and reports to me, has approved an amount of R386 080-00 for **Thembaletu Day Care Centre** in Donkerhoek.

The centre will benefit thirty-three (33) children ranging from one (1) to six (6) years of age. The funds will be used to erect building facilities for the centre and will also have a library and study centre. I will personally monitor this project to ensure that it is fully operational by no later than June next year. The Department of Social Development will support the centre by training Early Childhood Development practitioners as well as continuing with the feeding scheme to ensure that no child goes to bed on an empty stomach.

I would like to thank the Letsemeng Municipality for allocating the site for the centre. In the same spirit of partnership, I would like to urge the municipality expedite the approval of more land for the vegetable gardens that will ensure continuous supply of nourishing food for our children. I have no

doubt that the community of Donkerhoek will pride itself and jealously guard this centre to ensure that our government's resources do not go to waste.

In closing let me assure you that this government, under the leadership of the African National Congress and stewardship of our President, Mr Jacob Zuma will continue to work with various levels of community groups and non-governmental organizations to combat poverty and its associated challenges of substance abuse. Our government will also continue to work with all our social partners as we implement the National Drug Master Plan (2006-2011) and work towards a safer, healthier South Africa. We have, with no doubt, a long way to walk.

So today, what I am seeking from you is a commitment to take a good look inside, take a good look around, to see our responsibility and our calling to a higher self, a greater good and to be a part of the ongoing programmes which will be taking place to combat the problem of drug abuse in our beautiful country. Your individual actions each and every day, will help our communities and our country remain drug-free.

Let us work together to ensure that there is no place for drugs in our lives and our communities.
I thank you.