

**Address by the Minister of Social Development, Ms Bathabile Dlamini at the official opening on the National Youth Camp, De Brug Military Camp, Free State Province**

**2 December 2012**

Programme Director,

Honourable Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula,

MECs of Social Development here present,

Acting Director-General, Mr Coceko Pakade,

Distinguished Stakeholders in the Youth Development sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Boys and Girls,

Dumelang. Molweni. Ndaa. Sanibonani. Goeie more. Avuxeni. Good morning to you all.

We are pleased to welcome you all here to the official opening of the National Youth Camp, we appreciate this opportunity to interact with so many of our young people.

From the outset, I would like express my heartfelt gratitude to the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and her team for providing these facilities, and for the support they have given us from the beginning of this project to this day. The valuable support of the Passengers Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) also deserves a special mention.

In particular, I would like to thank all our young people who took part during the provincial dialogues, and came from every corner of our country to attend this exciting initiative.

We have brought these young people here not to speak to them, but to dialogue with them as they represent the realities of the situation of many young people in our country.

The theme of this National Youth Camp is: "Youth Working Together in Diversity". The relevance of this theme is profound, given the process of demographic transition taking place in South Africa today. The theme also reflects commitment to ensure that young people work together across race, ethnicity, language and creed to confront challenges and find solutions to issues affecting them.

In line with this commitment, we have organised this camp to provide viable and effective opportunities for young people to participate fully in the democratic life of our country.

This exciting camp is a starting point of our concerted effort to promote youth activism and civic engagement. This is also part of our contribution to nation building by unlocking the potential of young people as envisaged in the Masupatsela Youth Pioneers Programme.

A key objective of this National Youth Camp is to promote respect for diversity, social inclusion and encourage the participation of young people, especially those with fewer opportunities in the democratic life of our country.

We also hope to promote civic engagement, develop and nurture youth leadership among our young people.

Boys and Girls,

I have looked at the programme and it is filled with enjoyable activities. It is both interactive and participatory, and also provides opportunity to meet new friends, share experiences and to develop new possibilities for your future.

Most importantly, it provides you with various activities that are aimed at helping you to be better persons and better citizens of this country.

As you participate in the different camp activities, I am sure that you will also take time to interact with each other and make new friendship bonds across provinces, which is also one of the key objectives of this camp. More importantly, I hope you will continue to keep in touch and maintain the friendships beyond the camp.

You will also learn about the lives and times of two struggle heroes, namely Bantu Steve Biko and Kalushi Solomon Mahlangu. In 1979, and just few minutes before his execution by the apartheid regime, Solomon Mahlangu said, and I quote:

*"My blood will nourish the tree that will bear the fruit of freedom. Tell my people that I love them, they must continue the fight". Close quote.*

As young leaders in the making, we hope that you will be inspired by their selfless contributions to our liberation struggle, especially at this time as we endeavour to nurture a new cadre of youth leadership in our country. This requires that we work closely with youth organisations to unlock doors of opportunities, restore the moral fabric of our society while instilling strong values and morals in our young people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Africa has a large youth population. According to Statistics South Africa's Census 2011 data, the country's average age is 25. The data also shows that over a third of the South African population is under the age of 15. That is why we strive to inspire, motivate and empower young people to achieve their full potential.

Our Government has taken cognizance of the growing challenges associated with adolescents and youth and is committed to continue prioritising investments aimed at equipping and developing young people.

This is important if we are to safeguard our future. In 2009, President Zuma established the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) to ensure that investment on youth development takes place in all sectors of the South African society, including the private sector.

In accordance with its mandate, the NYDA has developed the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (2012-2016), which identify youth development as an urgent priority. Amongst others, the strategy identifies education and skills development, health and well-being, youth co-operatives, youth entrepreneurship and the promotion of social cohesion among the youth as key areas of strategic interventions. In order to provide young people with opportunities, Government has identified education as an apex priority.

Education is one proven vehicle through which we can extricate the majority of our young people, their families and communities from the scourge of poverty.

In addition, we have established youth-friendly health facilities throughout the country to enable young people to access reproductive health services. Specifically, Government is committed to tackle the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality to meet the current and future needs of our country.

Government is also committed to work in partnership with key stakeholders in the youth sector to reduce the high burden of HIV and AIDS, and to confront the worrying phenomenon of alcohol and substance abuse among the youth.

It is through such deliberate actions that we hope to achieve our goal of building a cadre of youth leadership and responsible citizens, as highlighted in the Bill of Responsibilities. I hope that as part of this camp, you will also learn about the values of rights and responsibilities.

While it is important for you to know and assert your rights, it is equally important to meet your responsibilities to learn, respect adults and to serve your communities.

I would like to appeal to our young people here today to join our Government's campaign in its resolute fight against alcohol and substance abuse, and the abuse of women and children. As parents, teachers and community leaders, we have an obligation to teach our children what is wrong and what is right.

Together, we must take a stand and address alcohol and drug problems in our homes and families, and carry these concerns into our community life. Equally, we must strongly condemn the high levels of violence against women and children.

We are also concerned about the recent high levels of violence in our schools. This indicates the need for increased civic education, especially for young boys to learn how to view women and men as equals. From a very young age, boys must learn how to tackle issues and differences through dialogue other than using violence as a means of resolving challenges.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to officials who have contributed their time, effort and energy to make this occasion a successful one. I wish all our young people a successful National Youth Camp.

I thank you.