

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DR BLADE NZIMANDE ADDRESS ON
THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL ARTISAN DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2019 HELD AT THE DURBAN
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE (ICC)

Thursday, 5th December 2019

Programme Director ;

Senior Management of the Department of Higher Education and Training;

My Special Advisors;

International Guests – Mr Christoph Buser and Dr Ashwani Aggarwal;

SETA Chief Executive Officers and Officials;

Technical and Vocational Education and Training College Representatives;

Community Education and Training Colleges Representatives;

Organised Labour Representatives;

Business and Industry Representatives;

Skills Development Providers

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

I am greatly honoured to welcome you all to this 3rd National Artisan Development Conference, hosted by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

I must state upfront that artisan skills development remains one of our 6th Administration's top priority.

Our gathering for the coming two days must answer the call of our people for decent work and increased training opportunities.

Therefore, having a social compact with all of you as our social partners and stakeholders becomes an important precondition for us to achieve our objective of rapidly expanding workplace-based learning through learnerships, work integrated learning and internships.

I am glad that represented here today we have organised business, organised labour, State Owned Companies, TVET Colleges, Government Departments, SETAs and other skills Development Providers amongst the many artisan development stakeholders.

Therefore, if I were to summarize and condense my message to you here today, it is that there can be no production of artisans unless there is a strong and dynamic partnership between all the stakeholders involved. At the heart of this partnership must be government, industry and TVET colleges. But in our case SETAs are a very important partner in all this.

For this partnership to work, the roles and contribution of each partner must be clearly defined and understood by all. Industry and workplaces are absolutely crucial as there is no artisan that can be produced only through theory without practical work experience. I always say employers and industry cannot be blaming government for not producing the skills needed unless industry is able to provide workplaces for practical experience.

Government needs to create conditions and a legal and regulatory framework for such partnerships to happen, including investing in TVET colleges and employment of competent personnel and management.

TVET college management, especially principals, must know that they are not running TVET colleges unless they prioritise the building of partnerships with industry. In fact I now intend to ensure that the performance agreements between my department and each college principal must involve ability of the principal to lead the forging of partnerships with industry and/or workplaces. For instance there should be no excuse for colleges in this industrial metro of eThekweni for not having a dynamic relationship with industry!

At some stage in my earlier stint in this department I had proposed very strongly that in each college, one of the vice principals and all campus manager must be tasked with the responsibility of establishing and servicing college-industry partnerships. I would like to know if that is happening at all, as the responsibility for industry partnerships in colleges must not be left to junior official or managers.

SETAs have to prioritise the facilitation of work placement, including trainee stipends for apprentices where needed. In fact I am going to be requiring a compact with the SETAs that they must provide

numbers and targets of apprentices they are supporting, including maintaining data of apprenticeships, in their respective sectors.

For me, gatherings like this, if they are not going to be talks, must be used to honestly reflect on evaluating the role of each partner in artisan training. In addition, each sector must identify obstacles in terms of its contribution towards artisan training and identify concrete actions and interventions required to overcome those.

It would also be ideal for this conference to emerge with a very concrete programme of action to accelerate artisan training and development. Part of that programme must include an assessment and concrete plans to incorporate recognition of prior learning (RPL) as another critical platform to produce more artisans, especially from those workers who have been doing artisan type work for years but without a strategy to help them to prepare and do trade testing.

The habit of second guessing each other between colleges and industry must come to an end. Industry cannot be complaining that colleges are not producing the type and quality of skills they need when we have created space for employer representatives to sit in college councils and curriculum committees. Similarly colleges cannot continue teaching outdated syllabi when they can create and forge partnerships with industry to know exactly what workplaces need.

For me what I have just said above constitute the gist of my message to this conference, and the rest of my input serves to underline and identify additional considerations that must be considered in the task of producing artisans. For example one matter that comes to mind is how should we as an education system be strengthening the preparation of apprenticeships through the expanded provision of STEM subjects. In addition reflections need to be made on what kind of foundation programmes are being provided or needed to support increased enrollment of apprentices.

I am delighted that this conference is held following President Cyril Ramaphosa's hosting of the 2nd Investment Conference and the Presidential Job Summit.

During the second Investment Conference, the President announced that there is R363 billion in investment commitments that have been achieved in our quest to secure R1.2 trillion in investment over five years.

If we are to make good use of these investments to grow our economy and create employment, better access to high-quality and relevant skills development must be prioritised.

Equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today, and those of tomorrow is a strategic concern for the national growth and expansion of our economy. In particular we need increased provision of engineering skills, ICT and social/personal skills required for successful work performance, if we are to turn our economy around.

We know that unemployment is the greatest challenge facing our country at this moment in its history. It has a devastating effect on families and communities, eroding people's dignity and contributing to social problems like poor health, poor education outcomes, substance abuse and crime.

We also know that extreme unemployment in our country is the product of an economy that for several decades has been starved of any meaningful investment in its human capital, where most people have been denied the opportunity to own assets or develop their skills.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are also gathered here today during the month in which President Ramaphosa launched the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children and also in a month in which we commemorate the 31st World Aids Day.

Recent increased incidences of violent attacks and murder of our students at various universities and TVET Colleges have been a point of concern to me and government at large. I denounce such barbaric and shameful acts against women, both in our institutions of learning and in society in general.

As government, we remain committed to create a safer and caring Post School Education and Training environment, where safety and protection all students, in particular female students and staff is guaranteed.

We have mandated the Higher Health, a programme of the Department, to implement a Gender Based Violence programme in university and TVET college campuses to mitigate the problems of gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS on our campuses.

We are also finalising the Policy Framework on Gender-Based Violence in the Post-School Education and Training System, which will be published by end of March 2020 for implementation.

I call upon all of you as stakeholders to join government in making our educational institutions and workplaces gender friendly places, where women empowerment and the safety of our women is a priority.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Therefore, our conference today, presents us with an opportunity as artisan development stakeholders and role-players to refresh our strategies and find more pragmatic approach in meeting our National Development Plan (“NDP”) target of producing 30 000 artisans per annum by 2030.

The NDP reminds us that South Africa belongs to all its people and the future of our country is our collective responsibility.

It is for this reason that I am happy that the International Labour Organisation and representatives from Switzerland, amongst others, are part of this Conference, so that we can engage and share our best practices.

According to the 2019, Quarter 3, Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the challenge facing our country today remains that of youth unemployment at 58% for the cohort between 15 and 24 years and 36% for the cohort between 25 and 34 years.

In the same quarter, we have also observed that young people between the ages of 15-34 years, who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) stand at 8.2 million.

This Conference must give us an opportunity to confront this reality by providing practical solutions in order for us to reverse this situation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In reflecting on our successes and planning for the future, it is befitting that I borrow former President Nelson Mandela’s quote, when he said: I quote “After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb”, unquote.

We have reached the pinnacle of one of the hills we needed to climb as we are ready to move with the publishing of the National Artisan and Apprenticeship Development Strategy 2030 pending finalisation of National Skills Authority processes.

The National Artisan and Apprenticeship Development Strategy 2030 will be the first for South Africa in that it will give a clear policy direction in relation to quality apprenticeship training.

This strategy seeks to facilitate the establishment of a national baseline for an integrated artisan development system, which defines critical components of artisan development, ranging from the artisan training system itself, funding regimes, artisan advisory structures, quality assurance, research and innovation, impact measurement issues and so forth.

It will ensure that as we move to the next hill, we have proper guidelines in implementing the National Artisan and Apprenticeship Development Strategy 2030.

At the centre of the strategy is the delivery of apprentice training through a dual apprenticeship system within the South African context and the ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeship System, which makes a call for labour market relevance.

Globally, apprenticeship (in the context of duality) has been proven to enable quality training through the integration of knowledge (theory) and practical training (simulation) jointly delivered at TVET colleges or Skills Development Providers, with on-the-job training (experiential learning) delivered at a designated workplace. We are also of the view that the system of apprenticeship should not only be limited to engineering programmes but to be extended to other TVET college programmes.

Distinguished guests,

We are now, more than ever, living in times of change; technical advancement with business innovation and self-improvement being the norm. Keeping up with all the changes remains a challenge.

New occupations are emerging and replacing others. Within each occupation, the required skills and competencies are evolving, as the knowledge content of production processes and services is rising.

The challenge for us is to simultaneously enhance the responsiveness of the education and training systems to these changes in skill requirements and at the same time improve overall access to training, skills development and innovation.

As part of modernizing our TVET college system, I intend to use my position as Minister who is also responsible for our national system of innovation, to incentivize, support and recognize innovation in our TVET college system. Just as we have science and innovation awards in our university system we must also have these in our TVET colleges. There are already a number of innovations happening in our TVET college space, but these have not been systematically supported and encouraged. I am inviting all of you to reflect on this matter of supporting innovation in our TVET colleges and share your ideas with me.

We must never forget that some of the best human inventions have come not just from university trained graduates and professionals, but also from artisans as well.

Recognising and supporting innovation in the TVET college sector is also important in the development and production of skills for the 4th Industrial Revolution and for these to be part of our National Artisan and Apprenticeship Development Strategy 2030.

We need to reform our curricula to make certain that these new industrial revolution developments are integrated into our education and training system (for an example: a qualified electrician should be able install, repair and maintain solar and automation systems). We equally need aircraft mechanics who will be trained on drone technologies.

However we must not only be consumers of technologies developed from somewhere else in the world, we must also be creators of new technologies and innovation, so that the rest of the world can also use our own inventions.

However it is also important that qualifying artisans must possess the soft skills needed to successfully enter workplaces as well as in running their own businesses. Much as colleges must learn from industry about which skills are relevant for workplaces, colleges also have an important contribution to make in teaching social and human relations skills to apprentices.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A vital pillar of a thriving society is the creation of jobs that help to provide sustenance, growth, dignity and prosperity for all our people.

We should aim to play a pivotal role in closing the skills gap in our country, facilitating the transfer of essential skills, knowledge and expertise, and helping to grow the economy.

For example, the study undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council indicates that the majority of apprenticeship and learnership participants (70% and 86% respectively) who completed their qualification experienced a smooth transition into stable employment.

Proper foundational training and skills development opportunities prepare future generations for their productive lives and provide them with the core skills to continue learning.

I trust that you will use this conference to reach out to each other, forge new and strengthen existing partnerships, with each of the participants and stakeholders knowing exactly what is expected of them. With determination and partnership nothing can stand on our way to create a better South Africa for all!

Just across the street at the Durban Exhibition Centre, we are expecting the public, school learners and unemployed youth to visit the Artisan Career Festival taking place from today until Saturday afternoon. Please do visit the Exhibition Centre, otherwise your participation at this gathering will be incomplete.

Thank you to all of you who continue to support our programmes and special thanks to the FP&M SETA as well as MERSETA who are our gold sponsors of this gathering.

I leave you with the wise words of Aristotle when he said that, I quote “The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet” unquote.

I wish you a successful conference.

I THANK YOU