

**Honourable Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Mr M Manana, MP
Speech – HEAIDS First Things First (HIV, TB, STIs)**

Provincial TVET Activation

23 February 2015, 10h00-13h30

Waterberg TVET College, Lebowakgomo Campus, Limpopo

Executive Mayor, Councilor G Kganyago

Waterberg TVET College Principal, Ms SE Lekoloane

Council Member, Masuha

Lebowakgomo Campus Manager, Mr T Senong

Representative of the Council, Mr CM Masonga

Director of HEAIDS, Dr R Ahluwalia

Student Representative Council President, Mr K Makgatho

Senior Government Officials

Higher Education Sector Leaders and local University Representatives

SANAC, Department of Health officials

United States Representatives, Development Partners and NGOs

Distinguished Guests and HEAIDS Private and Government partners;

Local Community Leaders;

Waterberg TVET College Staff and Students;

DHET/HEAIDS First things first ambassador, Ms Criselda Kananda

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It is my honour and pleasure this morning in the province of Limpopo, to extend a warm welcome to you at the “6th TVET College Activation” of

the HEAIDS “First Things First (HIV, TB, STIs) Programme” , here at the Waterberg TVET College, Lebowakgomo Campus specifically.

I want to start by acknowledging the Principal of the Waterberg TVET College for hosting us for the launch of the First Things First Campaign. Secondly, I would also like to acknowledge the Higher Education and Training HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS), which is my initiative, designed to eradicate the impact of HIV/STIs/TB and also aimed at strengthening general health and wellness issues in the higher education sector. This HEAIDS initiative is embedded on ensuring that we develop and produce a generation of healthy young South Africans that are productive in our economy and the nation at large.

My key objective in introducing such a critical HEAIDS programme at TVET college sector, across every district and province in the country is to provide a platform to:

- Improve quality of labour in our country;
- Increase throughput rates because if we do not address health and wellness issues there is an increase in student dropout rates;
- Improve youth development to ensure we have a competent pool of graduates in our sector; and
- Ensure we have healthy citizens-which becomes an increase in the return of investment, hence an improvement in our economy, which relates to the 3,5% GDP growth forecasts for the entire globe in 2015.

This event is timely, considering that the President of the Republic of South Africa has recognised in his 2015 State of the Nation Address (SONA) this month, the imperative to develop TVET college sector growth through identifying 16 sites for the construction of 12 new

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College campuses and the refurbishment of two existing campuses in the most under-privileged regions of our nation. This includes your own Thabazimbi Campus, a state of the art campus that will have sporting facilities and swimming pools to ensure that learners are engaged in other activities other than just teaching and learning. This is a clear reflection that the current Government of South Africa recognizes the immense contribution the TVET college sector has on improving the skills of the youth and that a rise in the higher education institutions will in return create a conducive environment for learning and teaching.

It is a known fact that the growth of the sector will escalate and our dedication to youth will pay off with healthy returns on investment, specifically considering the annual target of ensuring that one million job opportunities for youth are targeted annually, as outlined in our current National Development Plan.

Our President also made mention, I quote, “that our youth is our future and their success fills us with immense pride”, a symbol that he has prioritised youth in his budget and will focus on improving the livelihood of young South Africans, of which the growth and emancipation of the TVET college sector is key.

Programme Director, allow me to divert from the prepared speech as I want to engage with our College learners in a language and level that they will understand. When I was given the task to lead a healthy campaign targeting the higher education institutions, I asked that we focus on TVET Colleges because it is in these colleges where the capable skills workforce will be built. Since the launch of the “First

Things First Campaign” in 2012, in KwaZulu Natal, the College Principals have bought into the campaign and are seeing value in rolling it out.

Dr Ahluwalia of the Higher Education AIDS programme had earlier indicated how the rural communities are mostly affected by various ailments. It is under this background that campaigns like “First Things First” are brought closer to where our youth reside. Thus, a college should not only be about teaching and learning, but should also empower youth to choose healthy lifestyles.

So much money is injected by the Government into higher education and training, therefore there must be a focus on throughputs to ensure that those who graduate feed into the dire skills required to uplift the economy. The Government cannot be skilling people who could die prematurely because they did not take precaution or led healthy lifestyles after testing positive. It should be each and everyone’s aspiration to get employed or to be entrepreneurs and uplift their communities and the country at large, that has invested so much in them.

The Department is proud as we have seen an improvement in the uptake of learners into the TVET system. This will have a positive impact in our economy since much of the skills required can only be produced within the TVET Colleges. I am urging you not to look down upon College qualifications, but take pride in knowing that there are employment opportunities that are awaiting skilled personnel that TVET Colleges are offering.

As a Department we are encouraged that the entire sector is embracing the campaign. Since the commencement of this campaign within the TVET Sector, large numbers of learners have tested positive. However, this picture is not gloomy but gives an opportunity for better planning by the Government and partners to provide workable solutions. The HEAIDS will ensure that pre and post counselling as well as relevant support for those who have tested positive occurs BUT I encourage those who have tested negative to remain negative.

Throughout the years, we have managed to remove the stigma – as seen here, so many young people are enthusiastic and are heeding the call of testing. As you have heard from Ms Criselda Kananda, our First Things First Ambassador, you can still live longer even though you may test positive. The first thing for you is to get tested, know your status and take responsibility by living a healthy lifestyle.

There is this big phenomena of “Sugar Daddies” where grown up men prey on young girls who are desperate. Their desperation could be attributed to the socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and insufficient accommodation in TVET Colleges in particular. This makes young girls find solace in married adults who knowingly or unknowingly infect them. Your duty is to chase them away and use all tactics available as the Sugar Daddies do not have your best interests at heart. We are sending a strong warning to them (Sugar Daddies) to refrain from getting closer to our Colleges. As students, don’t be enticed by them showing off their nice cars – but choose to focus on your studies – your future is here.

This message is no joke, we have driven all the way to come and empower you. Your Principal should one day be proud to point to you as being his/her former students occupying high positions such as CEO of Eskom, Transnet, etc. compared to making speeches at funerals of departed students, on what could have been prevented.

Those who are sexually active please use a condom, those who are not please delay. Currently, I am told in Medupi (your neighbours) about 900 artisans have been imported because the country does not have those specific skills. You are here; we want to see you occupying those skills in the near future. Never again shall this country import skills at the expense of our youth who continue to be at the coal face of poverty and unemployment.

The DHET is partnering with the Department of Health to bring initiatives at least once a month in Colleges, nationally. We want you to live to be old enough so you can share with your grandchildren on how you weathered through the storms.

Once more, I repeat, make use of the opportunities presented to you. Most of you in TVET Colleges are supported with NSFAS Bursaries, evidence that you have a caring government – but we acknowledge there are some challenges.

We need to work together (College Management, SRC, students, etc.). This is a skills revolution. We will never agree on everything but let us find solutions and find one another. Be part of the solution and minimise disruptions and destructions.

I am making a clarion call for all to go and test and remember that should you test positive please do not despair. The College supported by the HEAIDS must make the environment conducive one for those affected. There are many ways in which the College can assist especially in our rural Colleges, things like providing gardening space for learners to plough, so they can eat healthily whilst minimising the expenses. Through the support of the mayor we can make available seedlings and crops for you to take home and plough.

On behalf of our government we applaud you for being attentive during the speeches – please share this information with families and friends.
Siyaqhuba – Re rakela pele.

Oops I almost forgot, there is a talent in TVET Colleges, the young learner that just rendered an opera piece – Sing a song for Africa (for a moment I thought I was listening to Sibongile Khumalo). With such talent, the Mayor and government at large in Limpopo must not import entertainment for official events from Johannesburg but should rather consider local talent.

Ke a leboha.