

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE (UFH) ALICE STUDENT VILLAGE PHASE 2 STUDENT HOUSING SCHEME

Monday, 31 May 2021

Thank you, Programme Director

A very warm welcome to:

Premier of the Eastern Cape Province, Mr Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane;
Executive Mayor of Nkonkobe Local Municipality, Councillor Anele Ntsangane;
Chairperson of Council: Bishop Ivan Abrahams;
Members of the University Council;
Vice Chancellor of UFH, Professor Sakhela Buhlungu;
Development Bank of South Africa delegation;
European Union Delegation;
UFH's Executive Management Team;
Ndlambe Traditional Authority, Prince Ncamashe;
Members of the SRC and Presidents of the SRC – (Alice and East London campuses);
Staff and students of UFH;
Labour representative members;
Members of the media;
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this ground-breaking event as we officially open this newly completed phase two of the Alice Student village housing scheme.

I wish to sincerely thank the Premier of the Eastern Cape Province for your unstinting support of UFH over many years, including bursary and scholarship support, for many generations of needy students.

Your support to not only UFH directly, but also to local and district-level governments in Nkonkobe, Bisho-King Williams Town and Buffalo City where its three campuses are located, is deeply appreciated.

Furthermore, I also wish to thank University Council, under the leadership of Bishop Abrahams, and the management for organizing this ceremony to mark an important chapter in the recent history of this great university.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the National Treasury, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and the European Union (EU) for working together with us to support our post school education and training infrastructure development and for this project in particular.

The provision of accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive student accommodation at all our post school education and training institutions is of great importance to provide quality teaching, learning, research and innovation spaces. It

is even more important and historically-significant with respect to the historically-black universities.

The University of Fort Hare (UFH) most certainly occupies a distinctive and unique historical place not amongst its higher education peers, but also in the memory of the struggle against colonialism and apartheid.

Founded in 1916, UFH has an iconic place as the cradle of academic and intellectual training for generations of African professionals and leaders not only in South Africa, but across the African continent, many of whom became the architects of post-colonial reconstruction and development.

It is after all here (in Alice) where leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo, ZK Matthews, Chris Hani, Ivy Florence Matsepe-Casaburri and pioneers such as the writer Can Themba and South Africa's first black female doctor, Mary Malahlela-Xakana, honed their knowledge and skills before their pioneering roles in society.

We owe it to these pioneers to ensure that Fort Hare is restored to its rightful place in the development of our democracy.

I wish to state categorically that our government, and my Ministry, is deeply committed to the project of revitalizing, stabilizing and transforming Fort Hare to become one of South Africa's and the continent's leading universities.

The unveiling of today's vast student residential village is one of a number of strategic investments our government will be implementing to ensure our words are backed by actions.

Critically important for our government is to ensure the success of our students, especially those from rural and poor backgrounds, to acquire the highest quality education and training to enable them to fully and confidently take their places in every walk of social, economic, political and cultural life.

At a national level, through the Student Housing Infrastructure Programme (SHIP), we have completed feasibility studies for about 14 000 student beds as part of our SHIP Phase 1 developments.

Major infrastructure development has happened across the system at all institutions over this time, with at least 34% (R9.719 billion) of the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant (IEG) funding being provided to the eight historically black universities (HBU's).

Such a significant investment in HBU's registers our commitment to disrupt and transform the long history of unequal spatial, institutional and social development which had marked the development of our higher education for over a century.

Today we are here to launch and celebrate the fruit of this collaboration. During the 2016/17 financial year, we allocated R122 million for the construction of phase 2 of this student village comprising of 1450 new student beds and a student centre.

I must indicate that my department has allocated a total of R1.211 billion towards infrastructure development at this university. This must be applauded!

Government has made infrastructure development as one of the pillars of our Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (ERRP).

We want to increasingly link the development of our post-school education and training sector, including our strategic investments, to support the underlying policy goals of the ERRP .

My Department will be focusing on investments in infrastructure projects that seeks to achieve the following priorities:

- Facilities for strategic study fields required to be responsive to the strategic priorities of South Africa;
- Digital transformation of universities;
- Effective and efficient use of existing university buildings and facilities as well as the refurbishment and renewal of dilapidated university buildings and facilities;
- Student housing;
- Regulatory compliance of aging buildings and facilities; and
- Projects that enable a holistic teaching and learning environment.

Since the introduction of the IEG programme in 2007/08, the Department of Education and its successor, our current Department of Higher Education and Training has made a total of R28.175 billion available for investment in university infrastructure.

As some of you may know, in more recent years, student accommodation has been identified as an urgent priority by the Department for almost all public universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

We are currently in the process of reviewing the 2015 student housing minimum norms and standards to incorporate student housing at TVET colleges.

We will also use the Capital Infrastructure Expansion Grant to address the serious backlogs in infrastructure maintenance in TVET colleges, with particular focus on improving the teaching and learning environment.

To give context to the journey that we travelled in our quest to invest in our PSET infrastructure, some of you will recall that in February 2012 we officially launched the Ministerial Review of Student Housing at Universities.

For the first time in our democratic State, we have a comprehensive view of the shortage of student housing at every university, and every campus.

We got our first real sense of the size and severity of the student housing shortage – it was an eye-opener not only for government, but also for our universities and the private sector.

Given this context, I believe that we all might agree that the shortage of suitable on-campus accommodation for students at our post school education and training institutions is a major issue, which requires both an urgent response to immediate challenges and a long-term solution for the sector.

This view was supported during our Student Housing Symposium held in July 2016 with a wide range of role players, both in government and in the private sector.

During this symposium, as a Department, we forged partnerships in finding lasting solutions for tackling the shortage of student housing.

A wide range of partners including the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), National Treasury and the EU through its Infrastructure Investment Programme for South Africa made a commitment to support the Department's Student Housing Infrastructure Programme by providing financial support for the development of student housing projects at university and college campuses that provide large numbers of beds and build living and learning communities.

On 24 July 2019, the Department, National Treasury and the DBSA concluded a Memorandum of Agreement to establish a Management Office to oversee the Student Housing Infrastructure Programme.

Phase two of the Alice Student Village is one of our first projects to be completed through this partnership between my Department, National Treasury, the EU and the DBSA partnership.

This handover ceremony shows that it is not only possible but vital to secure diverse forms of strategic partnerships, including with the private and development sectors, to solve the long-term challenges of student accommodation in a sustainable manner.

Ladies and gentlemen

As I conclude, I would like to address one of the most ignored aspect of our infrastructure provision, which relates to the maintenance and protection of our post school education and training infrastructure.

As the primary funder of infrastructure at public universities and colleges, the Department needs to ensure that infrastructure is properly maintained and managed.

Due to deferred maintenance of facilities, maintenance costs have escalated beyond what universities and Government can afford. Consequently, facilities are prematurely reaching the end of their useful lives.

It therefore becomes important that when new facilities are built, life cycle costs and its financial provisioning, are taken into account.

I would like to urge UFH to ensure that it must continue to regularly maintain its infrastructure including this new built student campus.

Equally, I also want to urge its users, our students, to protect and cherish these new facilities as you are also custodians of an asset for future generations.

No single facility, including our residences, can be allowed to be neglected, vandalized and harmed, regardless of our disputes and differences over the normal affairs in the life of our universities. I call on you to protect and cherish it with all your commitment.

The Department remains committed to support the University of Fort Hare to develop sufficient infrastructure and student residences that can positively impact on the overall student learning experience.

I wish you well in your efforts to deliver student residences that will improve student life experiences on campus.

Lastly, echoing what President Ramaphosa said in addressing the nation yesterday, COVID-19 is still with us and that it may be a matter of time before the country as a whole will have entered a third wave, following the Free State, Northern Cape, North West and Gauteng who already reached the threshold of a third wave of infections.

Therefore, let us all ensure that we continue with upholding the health and safety protocols including the wearing of masks, physical distancing, ensuring adequate ventilation and limits on the number of people who attend gatherings.

Once again, I thank all the partners that supported my Department and the University in making this exciting project possible.

I thank you!