

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION DR
BLADE NZIMANDE REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT TO THE
ELIJAH BARAYI MEMORIAL TRAINING CENTER ARTISAN ACADEMY (EBMTC)

NUM President, Mr Joseph Montisetse;
Deputy President, Mr Phillip Vilakazi;
Acting General Secretary, Mr William Mabapa;
Treasurer-General, Mpho Phakedi;
DHET DDG for Skills Development, Mr ZC Mvalo and his team;
My Ministry staff,
Members of the media
Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for this great effort especially by an affiliate of our labour movement. I am indeed happy to be joining you here today.

As we know now that our challenges as a country can be characterised as that of fourfold developmental challenges of Covid-19, economic crisis, the multiple crises of social reproduction and climate change.

This pandemic has further exposed the enormous inequalities and poverty we face as a country.

We therefore need everyone's effort, especially our labour movement, with its tried and tested experience in advancing and defending the course of our revolution in all fronts, including but not limited to skills development for many years.

Our own publication (Fact Sheet on Adult Literacy in South Africa) in March 2021 indicates that in 2019, the South African adult illiteracy rate was 12%, reflecting a significant improvement of 7.1% over the past decade, from 19.2% in 2009, representing a decrease from 5 746 702 (5.7 million) in 2009 to 4 421 558 (4.4 million) in 2019.

However, illiteracy rate remains at 14% amongst Black Africans and 10.3% amongst Black Coloureds, this poses a challenge to all of us and our labour movement.

The main challenge though, remains that of our young people between the ages of 15 – 24 years old whose unemployment rate stands at 63.2% and 3,053 000 (3 million) of the same cohort not in employment, education and training (NEET) by the fourth quarter of 2020.

The COVID-19 has complicated matters further for all of us, as it forced us to think and do things differently and we are forced to adapt to this 'new normal' that we are living at the moment.

Some of the scientists tell us that we are now living in the age of the pandemics.

Skills development remains a critical enabler in all facets of our society, now we know what the benefits of skills development are, especially artisan development, as our own tracer studies tell us that absorption rate is as high as 81% by the labour market.

With your planned investment in entrepreneurship support intervention for artisans, we should expect high absorption rate of artisans by our labour market.

I am even more excited that most of your areas of focus are within those occupations that are high in demand in the country such as Boiler Making, Bricklaying, Electricians, Fitter and Turner, Instrument Mechanician, Plumbing and Welding.

I have also noted that some of these trades are featuring high in our Centres of Specialisation (CoS) and the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

If we are to reconstruct and recover our economy we need to expand artisan development, we need everyone, not only government, in this massive drive to produce artisans, as you know very well that our National Development Plan (NDP) target is to produce 30 000 per annum by 2030.

The mining sector has not been doing well in terms of creating employment, comparing the fourth quarter of 2019 and 2020, it lost about 46 000 jobs whilst between the third quarter and fourth quarter of 2020 it lost about 35 000.

At some point in 2017, this sector had a workforce of about 446 000 now is at 384 000, this simple means much more needs to be done, by all of us, skills development is our game changer, if this sector has to grow and prosper, having noted that in the fourth quarter of 2020 it contracted to -1.4%.

I am delighted with your vision to:

- contribute towards the country's' mandate, with the priority to upskill working-class people to possess the skills required in the current and future labour market given the emergence of a new industrial revolution.
- support government interventions in skills formation through the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and the National Artisan Development Strategy and Implementation Plan (NADS) and
- support Artisan Graduates who want to become self-employed to be successful entrepreneurs. The fourth is to reskill the working class with the skills necessary for the fourth industrial revolution.

I fully agree and support that this Academy must priorities retraining and upskilling the workforce to preserve jobs in the mining sector, this is also linking well with our Fourth Intervention in our Skills Strategy to support Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

Our Skills Strategy focus on the implementation of programmes that support the retraining of existing workforce to also take on new roles.

To further support the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, one of our other Skills Strategy critical intervention, (Intervention Seven), focusses on the need to support the skills required for entrepreneurship in ways that enable entry level entrepreneurial activities through to higher end enterprises that rely on innovative research and development.

I fully support the plans by the Academy to establish an SMME support programme for artisans who complete their training and wish to establish themselves in business.

As the National Development Plan envisions that about 11 million jobs should be created between 2020 and 2030, majority should be within the SMME sector.

Another important area that excites me, is your investment in Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL), this is the area, with huge potential, to expand artisan development in our country.

I have noted that your focus is to benefit workers in critical areas of our economy such as mining, construction, energy and manufacturing, this is what is called a progress labour movement, which takes into account the needs of the entire economy.

In March 2017 I published a Criteria and Guideline for Implementation of ARPL, in Government Gazette 40691 which establishes and facilitates clear processes and procedures to be followed in order to become an artisan through recognition of prior learning.

The ARPL pathway is also recognized in the draft National Artisan Development Strategy and Implementation, 2018 published in Government Gazette 41704.

There is an ARPL unit at INDLELA (DHET institute that develops and implements an integrated learner registration management information system linked to provinces and regional structures) which specializes in assisting training and trade test centres in the establishment, practice and implementation of ARPL.

Linked to the ARPL unit at INDLELA, National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB) is always ready to assist public and private providers to establish artisan training and trade test centres.

Annually, NAMB facilitates, carries out in loco audits and recommends accreditation of more than 200 training and trade test centres to the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), as a quality assurance body.

I have interest in this ARPL pathway and urge the Academy to work closely with NAMB and INDLELA considering your goals which you endeavour to achieve.

It is important that the Academy continue its close cooperation with the Department and the SETAs to ensure that this Academy is amongst the best in the country, especially with its background and vision.

You might be aware that, to encourage investment artisan development, the Artisan Learner Grant has now increased from R165 000 to R206 290 with effect from 01 April 2021. This will go a very long way in assisting business and industry continue with apprenticeship programmes.

I am aware that there is a planned meeting between NUM and Construction SETA during this month, I want to see more of these interactions and partnerships with the post school system especially with the relevant SETAs and QCTO.

This will ensure that programmes offered by the Academy are accredited and aligned.

As I conclude, I let me remind you that COVID-19 is still with us and it is important that all of us should continue to keep to the health and safety protocols. I would also request the NUM leadership to continue to ensure that all NUM members and employee in general keep to these protocols.

This will ensure that we limit the spread of the virus and further infections.

I thank you all.