

Minister Pandor's address to the HEAIDS partner-and-stakeholder breakfast

Southern Sun Hotel, O R Tambo International Airport

16 August 2018

Executive Director of UN Women, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-
Ngcuka, Chairperson of the HEAIDS board, Prof Willem de
Villiers, Deputy Chairperson, Mrs Helen Tlatleng, Vice
Chancellors and University leaders present

Good morning

This is an important gathering between the Higher Education
and Training Health Wellness and Development Centre
(HEAIDS), which is an entity of the Department of Higher
Education and Training, and partners.

The purpose is to strengthen relationships and to see how we
can collectively serve our university and college communities
better with respect to health and wellness and HIV and AIDS
related challenges.

This is an exciting moment for the HEAIDS programme - and
for the higher education sector - as it embarks on a new phase
of its journey.

Government's decision to provide fee-free college and
university education support for students from poor and low-
income families is an historic one. It has the potential to help
overcome the inherited inequalities that continue to trouble our
society. It also holds out the promise of strengthening our
national skills base as an essential ingredient for stronger

economic growth.

You will know that this massive investment in higher education comes at a time when budgets for almost all other government programmes are being frozen or even reduced.

This is an indication of the importance that government attaches to higher education.

However, the challenges in higher education are far more complex than student funding.

It's a major problem that so many students we fund fail to graduate. It's a waste of money and talent.

We want to help students to graduate. We want to help students to succeed. We want students to help us to succeed as a country.

Success requires a lot of help from individuals and organisations with varied skills and resources.

The DHET's R1 billion a year University Capacity Development Programme (or UCDP) is a programme that will provide special grants to promote comprehensive transformation at universities.

This programme will give concrete meaning to the call for the decolonisation of our academic institutions through funding interventions focused on the curriculum and on organisational culture.

But it will go beyond this by enabling the creation of intervention to support student success, build the capacity of

academic development and management staff of universities will also be funded.

The thinking behind the UCDP has much in common with the new vision and expanded mandate of HEAIDS.

The HEAIDS programme was initiated in 2001 under the then Department of Education, which at the time was led by Minister Kader Asmal, purely as a response to the HIV crisis that was gripping the country. At the time there was no effective treatment for the infection, and inevitably that led to premature death. Prevention of infection through safe sexual practices was the only effective response and we were anxious to empower students to make the right choices.

Thankfully, much has changed since then.

HIV treatment is now effective and prevention options are now widely available and we are much wiser about the complexity of facilitating change in sexual behaviour or any health-related behaviour, for that matter.

In particular, our efforts at preventing HIV through changing personal behaviour have taught us to respect the power of social factors in determining our health.

We have become much more sensitive to the impact of stigma and prejudice on the way we manage our own health issues.

The HEAIDS Programme has evolved alongside this expanded understanding of prevention health programmes. In the campus context it has become clear that any successful HIV programme has to deal with the empowerment of young women, the elimination of gender-based violence, the rights of LGBTI students, issues of masculinity, the mental stresses of

student life, reckless alcohol use, and so on.

HEAIDS has expanded its work to embrace these challenges.

At the same time, it incorporated the country's 50 TVET colleges into its programme offerings in 2013. And, in 2017, HEAIDS registered as a Not for Profit Organisation and redefined its central purpose as promoting health, wellness and development in the post school education and training sector.

In so doing, HEAIDS, and its partners in the private, NGO and public sectors, become even more relevant to our campus communities and post-school education system as a whole.

The repositioning of the HEAIDS programme reminds me of the definition of health in the charter of the World Health Organization. That definition emphasises that health is not merely the absence of disease, but a "state of physical, mental and social well being".

If we accept this definition, and the enormous challenges that it implies, then the connection between comprehensive student health programmes and the academic success of students is very obvious.

What is equally obvious is that health is too big a matter to be left purely to doctors and nurses. While they may play a leading role when it comes to physical health, the mental and social aspects require a much broader set of role-players.

The HEAIDS programme has been foremost in the higher-education sector in showing how students themselves can be mobilised as a force for health, as peer educators and as campus media workers.

The HEAIDS programme has also proved that it's possible to reach across sectors in the interests of our students and has facilitated many valuable relationships with health service providers.

We need to build extensively on these foundations in order to provide supportive, comfortable environments at all institutions, where students will derive a sense of well-being and the best possible chance of academic success.

Tertiary-level students are subject to enormous stress, and mental health problems among students are widespread.

There are stresses related to transition to adulthood, academic performance, responsibilities of being professionals-in-training, and, in many cases, stresses arising from poverty or living in unsafe and insecure environments.

Stress is also a contributor to physical illness and may trigger risky responses, such as excessive drinking and drug use.

As many of you would have seen and felt, the impact of gender-based violence (GBV), has taken centre stage both in our country and higher education in particular in the last year.

In taking action against gender-based violence, I am particularly thankful for the commitment and support from our stakeholders and development partners.

The United Nations (UN) Women has, during the past year, partnered with the HEAIDS programme to finalise a GBV Policy and Strategy Framework.

In addition to funding, they have provided technical guidance and expertise, as well as access to innovative strategies in relation to web-based platforms, safer city toolkits and various other resources from their wider repertoire of resources and experience in this area.

I'm delighted that we have the Executive Director, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, in attendance at this event, and I look forward to learning from her on the steps we should take to be ready to release the higher education GBV Policy Framework and, more importantly, its implementation thereafter.

We know that the more resilient students find a way to transcend these personal challenges, but others are overwhelmed and add to the numbers of those who fail to graduate. Either way, appropriate support through positive, affirming health and wellness programmes will make a world of difference.

The message I would like to leave you with this morning is that comprehensive, innovative health and wellness programmes are absolutely essential to the effective operation of the higher-education sector and to the welfare of our student population.

They are not an unnecessary luxury, but an example of the kind of collaboration we need to ensure the success of our universities and colleges.

And so, the Department of Higher Education and Training welcomes the ambition of the HEAIDS programme and its determination to expand its scope of work.

We are proud to have given birth to the organisation and appeal to all HEAIDS partners, and potential partners, to

double their efforts to support and nurture our students.

Thank you.

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