

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, PROF BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF DEBATE OF THE 2024 STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS, 14 FEBRUARY 2024

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Nosiviwe Maphisa-Nqakula;
Honourable President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa;
Deputy President, Mr. Paul Mashatile;
Ministers and Deputy Ministers;
Honourable Members:

Honourable President, last week you clearly articulated the interventions of the ANC government to reverse centuries of colonial rule and apartheid in South Africa.

Over the past 30 years, we have significantly increased access especially for students from poor and working-class backgrounds in our post-school education and training system.

In 1994, the number of enrolled students in our PSET system were 495 356. In 2013, this number more than doubled to 980 000 students. In 2019, the total number of enrolments at universities, TVET and Community Colleges stood at 2 129 522 students.

Black university students increased from 49% in 1994 to 71% in 2021. In 2021, almost 1.3 million students enrolled in public and private higher education institutions.

Sixty percent of university students are now women. In the same year, our TVET college enrolments reached 589 083, reflecting a 30.2% or 136 806 increase when compared with 2020.

Honourable Speaker, NSFAS represents one of the most progressive interventions by the ANC government. Since inception in 1991, NSFAS has funded over 5 million students.

Put differently, since 1991, NSFAS funding has grown from disbursing R21.4 million to almost R48 billion, and in 2024 it will reach the R50 billion mark!

For 2024, NSFAS has transferred R4.2 billion as upfront payment to all our institutions, so that no NSFAS student will have to pay any registration fees upfront. We urge our universities in particular to cooperate with us.

To date, NSFAS has already provisionally approved funding for 989 998 students. 230 394 are TVET College students and 759 604 are university students. We are engaging with the SARS salary verification process with the view to ensure that no applicant is disadvantaged.

Out of those provisionally funded, 791 405 are SASSA beneficiaries. So Tinswalo is automatically approved for NSFAS if she has been a SASSA beneficiary.

One of our most notable milestones in 2010 was the extension of NSFAS to TVET colleges. The NSFAS grant disrupts intergenerational poverty and provides families with a better life, most of whom being the first ever university or college graduates in their families.

It is therefore not surprising that our detractors are attacking NSFAS because it is a huge achievement for the ANC. Parties like the DA are anti-poor and don't want to see this progress. This is why in the Western Cape; they deny poor students the opportunity to go and study medicine in Cuba!

We have responded to the call to provide financial support for the Missing Middle through the introduction of the first phase of the Comprehensive Student Funding Model this year.

This is a loan scheme that aims to support students who come from families with a total household income of more than R350 000, but not more than R600 000 per annum. This loan has an incentive, as students who finish on record time will have half of the loan converted to a bursary.

To date, the NSFAS loan scheme for the Missing Middle has already received 22 954 applications. President, while we highlight the successes of NSFAS, as Minister, I have also openly acknowledged that, NSFAS does have challenges.

This is why we have made additional money available to strengthen the capacity of NSFAS. We are also working closely with DPME and forming strong partnerships with both public and private financial institutions, as well as with universities and colleges, and continue to support the board's efforts to ensure stability and clean governance.

The President recently announced the planned establishment of two new universities. The University of Science and Innovation in Ekurhuleni that

will focus on high-impact and cutting-edge technological innovation; and the University for Crime and Policing Studies in Hammanskraal. Feasibility studies for the two are now complete.

In 2013, we have also established two new universities- Sol Plaatje and Mpumalanga universities. In 2023, we launched various infrastructure projects at our universities and TVET Colleges.

We also applaud you President for launching the Presidential PhD Programme worth R1 billion to send our young people to leading science and research institutions to various parts of the world for training and exposure so that they can come back and serve our country.

Our infrastructure projects include the following-

- Ikhala TVET College New Campus at Sterkspruit, as well as other 15 new TVET new campuses all of them in rural areas;
- University of Venda Faculty of Health Sciences Building;
- Nelson Mandela University Science Centre and Planetarium;
- University of the Western Cape 2700-Bed Student Residence and Education Precinct (accommodating 6 departments);
- Walter Sisulu University East Teaching Mall (19 lecture halls and 13 tutorial rooms), 314-Bed Student Residences and IT Hub;
- Sefako Makgatho Health Science University Information and Communications Technology Network Refurbishment (entire campus); and
- New Skills Centres built by our SETAs, including in Sekhukhune by WRSETA and Richmond built by FP&M SETA.

We also wish to confirm that we are on course to build the Tshwane University of Technology Campus at Giyani and open it by 2025.

We have increased our Centres of Specialisation at public TVET Colleges from 26 in 2019 to 53 in 2024 and have invested R238 million to upgrade infrastructure at these centres.

We have increased the number of Trade Test Centres at TVET Colleges to 35 by end of 2023. In December last year, I launched our 35th Trade Test Centre on welding. This is the first one in SOWETO.

Up until 1994, there was only one Trade Test centre in Olifantsfontein. So, Tinswalo does not have to travel all the way from eKhalankomo in the Eastern Cape to Olifantsfontein in Gauteng.

We are currently producing an average 20 000 qualified artisans per year, and we are on course to meet the NDP target of 30 000 per annum by 2030.

We are actively fighting against the scourge of GBV in the PSET sector. In 2020, we launched our GBV Policy Framework and last year, we launched our transforming Men'talities programme to mobilise men against GBV.

Through our entity Higher Health, we have reached 80% of students by offering a variety of psycho-social services. In 2023, we also launched a National Civic Education and Health Skills Programme.

From 2016 to 2023, we increased a proportion of students living with disabilities in our PSET institutions to about 0,8 percent.

In conclusion, since the 7 of October 2023, Israel has destroyed all the 12 universities in Gaza and has gone further and killed 94 university professors and 4,327 students and injured 7,819.

This is the kind of barbarism that is wholeheartedly supported by morally depraved parties like the DA- an organisation that projects itself as the custodian of morality and ethics, when it is nothing else but a modernised version of apartheid.

We reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine and commit to building stronger academic and scientific partnerships.

Siyabuya!!!