

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, PROF. BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCASSION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ENGINEERING CAMPUS OF THE IKHALA TVET COLLEGE, 18 APRIL 2024**

Programme Director, Ms Tembisa Futshane, Deputy General for Community Education and Training;

Honourable Pemmy Majodina, Chief Whip of the majority party;

Mayor of the Joe Gqabi District Councillor Mphoselwa;

Mayor of the local municipality, Councillor Stokhwe and all councillors present;

Chief Nkopane, Basotho Traditional Council - Ah Koena - and other traditional leaders present;

Director General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi;

Cde Ngcukaitobi, Provincial Secretary of the ANC in Eastern Cape, leadership of our Alliance, and representatives of other political parties

Mfundisi Xwazi;

College Principal, Mr T Ntlangano;

SRC President, Ms Madikane;

Senior officials from our post-school education and training system;

Representatives of business and labour organisations;

The learners and students;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests:

I am very delighted to be here at this very historic occasion, which marks the launch of yet another new campus of one of our TVET colleges.

Since the advent of democracy, the democratic government has been investing heavily in expanding our post-schooling education and training sector, through among others, building new TVET Colleges and Universities, and by expanding the capacity of existing ones.

Government has spent over R221m in this infrastructure, from DHET helped by a number of our SETAs!

When we launch this let us remember the people and children of Gaza who are being butchered by the Israeli apartheid regime. All colleges and universities are destroyed and close to a 100 professors have been killed.

When the Recapitalisation Programme ended in 2008, our TVET College sector had not had a planned expansion programme and as a result, there has been almost no systematic capital investment in major infrastructure.

One of the consequences of ceasing the Recapitalisation Programme was the very high numbers recorded in the 2011 Census for young people who are not in any employment, education and/or in training or what is sometimes referred to as NEETs.

In response to the NEETs challenge, one of the strategic goals I set myself as Minister, was to expand access to our post-school institutions, and more especially within the TVET College sector.

Related to this, is my long-held vision of changing the negative perceptions that are often erroneously associated with TVET Colleges and to reposition our TVET Colleges as institutions of choice for our young people.

But also, to shatter the myth that the only way in which our young people can acquire a skill or build a career is by attending a traditional university. The experiences of many countries have shown that this is not necessarily true.

There are other pathways to skills development and careers other than through traditional universities. The task of repositioning our TVET Colleges as critical enablers for youth skills development and career progression is given greater significance by our National Skills Development Strategy.

This Strategy talks about promoting the growth of our public TVET College system and ensuring that it is responsive to the sector, local regions and the national skills needs and priorities.

In line with the objects of our National Skills Development Strategy and in support of my strategic goal of expanding access for young people into your PSET system, in 2012 government announced that a total allocation of R2.5 billion would be made available from the levy grants.

Then in my 2012/13 Budget Vote speech, I reiterated government's pronouncement and noted that the National Skills Fund (NSF) had committed R1.5 billion.

I further announced that our SETAs would contribute the R1 billion difference towards the construction of fifteen (15) new TVET College campuses and the refurbishment of three (3) existing ones.

In line with these financial commitments by government, over the last five years and more, my Department has been carrying out massive infrastructure development projects in both our TVET Colleges and universities, across the country.

Some of these infrastructure projects include the following-

- 15 new TVET new campuses all of them in rural areas;
- The University of Venda Faculty of Health Sciences Building;
- The Nelson Mandela University Science Centre and Planetarium;
- The University of the Western Cape 2700-Bed Student Residence and Education Precinct (accommodating 6 departments);
- The Walter Sisulu University East Teaching Mall (19 lecture halls and 13 tutorial rooms), 314-Bed Student Residences and IT Hub;
- The 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.

Therefore, the launch of the Engineering campus here at Ikhala TVET College forms part of an ongoing and massive TVET College infrastructure expansion programme by my Department.

Given the socio-economic challenges faced by young people in the Joe Gqabi district it is important that we contextualise today's event. Today is not just about unveiling this state-of-the-art building.

Today is also about three other important things. The first is to promote the value of education among the young people of the Joe Gqabi District.

Through this facility we are also trying to get our young people to value education more and to get them to go into those careers that are critical for the socio education development of this district and our country.

The second point is about promoting skills development for our young people. Just last week Friday, with the support of our Services SETA, we launched a skills development centre in the rural town of Mkhuze, in Northern KwaZulu- Natal.

This centre will expose young people to the real-world experiences that will better equip them for the workplace, and it will also offer mentorship programs and workshops tailored to the needs of the local community.

Partnership with local workplaces, through local business and municipalities is of utmost importance eg. Local bed and breakfast facilities, etc. My mayors please open up municipalities for workplace training of our TVET college students and graduates!

The third point I wish to make relates to community involvement and ownership of this College. Just like other public TVET Colleges, Ikhala TVET College is a community resource.

This means that, the community around this College has a duty to protect the facility we are launching here today. It would break my heart if I were to come back here in a few years' time and find this facility in state of neglect.

The fourth point I wish to make is mainly directed at our students and in particularly our student leadership. There is a disturbing trend in our country where if our students are unhappy about one or the other thing, they resort to damaging the property of our TVET Colleges and Universities.

Our people died for the right of our young people to gain access to quality education and so, by damaging the infrastructure of public TVET Colleges and universities, you are jeopardising the future of your own younger sisters and brothers.

I therefore wish to plead with our students and say: you have a constitutionally protected right to protest, but you don't have the right to damage public property and jeopardise the future of your own younger siblings.

In conclusion, as a part of this launch, we have organised a variety of exhibitions and presentations, which are meant to expose the young people here to a wide range of careers and enable them to make informed career choices.

I wish to encourage all the young people who are here to make sure they visit the exhibition stalls and get as much information as possible.

I also wish to thank all our partners that we were involved in ensuring that this project is concluded. Let us look after this facility and ensure that we use it in a way that will change the lives of the young people of the Joe Gqabi district.