

**MEC'S OPENING REMARKS AT CAREER EXHIBITION IN KOFFIEFONTEIN,
LETSEMENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

Saturday, 8 June 2013

Programme Director,

Hon Mayor of Letsemeng, Cllr Thandi Reachable

Hon Councillors of the Letsemeng Local Municipality

Mr Pieter Kotzee, CEO of Petra Diamonds,

The District Director of the Department of Education,

The principal and the school governing body of Reakiletse Secondary School

The educators of schools in the Letsemeng Local Municipality

Exhibitors and supporters,

Ladies and gentlemen

The month of June has become known as Youth Month on our national and provincial calendar. The Free State provincial government does not limit its focus on the commemoration of the 37th anniversary of the June 16 Soweto uprising, but we dedicate a programme of activities throughout the month of June to focus specifically on youth issues.

While the youth of 1976 fought for freedom and the creation of a democratic state, today's youth activism is directed towards successfully tackling the challenges of combating poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS, personal development, economic freedom and the development the country.

The results of *Census 2011* portrays South Africa as a youthful nation with the average age of the population at 25 years old and a third of our population of 52 million under the age of 15 years.

Even though a youthful nation is generally regarded as a positive development, viewed against the background of the country and specifically the Free State's unemployment statistics, it is a cause for concern that our youth make up 4,5 million of the unemployed of our nation.

One of the five priority outcomes of government is Education, specifically because of the strategic and important role it plays in the transformation of society at all levels. At political and management level, the Free State Department of Education has made significant strides to improve the quality of basic education in the Free State. Various other departments, such as the Department of Social Development and the Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation, continues to play a vital supportive role in achieving the education outcomes that we have set for ourselves.

We have seen and experienced the commitment of our educators and learners throughout the province to ensure that they use the opportunities provided through the school education system to achieve a better and brighter future. Our education system is not only pre-occupied with the academic potential of learners. We focus on the learners' total development into young adults who are well-equipped with appropriate life skills to contribute as responsible citizens to our nation.

Government can never allow the strides that we have made to be derailed by such deplorable incidents as the one that emerged at the Wilgehof Primary School in Bloemfontein during the past week. There is no place for the racist attitudes and practices of the past in our present and we commend the MEC and HOD of the Department of Education for taking decisive action that will ensure that a proper culture is re-established in that school. The lessons we have learnt from the 1976 Soweto uprisings, will continue to ensure that the Bill of Rights enshrined in our Constitution remains a living document that defines our character as a nation.

During our recent visits to towns in the Letsemeng Local Municipality, we had to acknowledge that we need to do more to create awareness of and access to career opportunities for the youth in this area. But we also recognized that we cannot achieve success when we work in isolation. The provincial and local government sectors therefore joined hands with the private sector as well as national and provincial departments and public entities to facilitate this Career Exhibition today.

Today's career exhibition therefore brings together a multitude of opportunities available to the youth. It must serve as a rallying point and a further motivating force to young people in general and learners in particular to take up the opportunities of education and skills development in various fields of study. It should also create awareness of opportunities both in and outside government that can be accessed by everyone.

Government must respond appropriately to the challenge of unemployment and poverty faced by our youth. It has been recognized that the challenge of job creation is not necessarily the lack of jobs but a lack of requisite skills to fill the available job opportunities, both in the public and private sector. Today, young people from around this municipality will have the opportunity to learn more about careers that can be pursued and the skills or knowledge required to follow those careers.

In addition, the Career Exhibition also provides an opportunity to access other relevant and essential government services such as identity documents, social grant applications and voter registration.

We have to be consistent in our efforts to ensure that youth development and empowerment remain a priority in all programmes and projects undertaken by the provincial and local government as well as the private sector. It is a responsibility we dare not fail as the scale of the social ills targeting our young people has left an indelible mark on our households and communities.

Drug and alcohol abuse, rape, teenage pregnancies, gangsterism and illegal gambling are all characteristics of an idle youth not actively preparing and participating in creating a better future not only for themselves, but also for their families and communities.

We must therefore ensure that we consciously put in place the programmes that respond appropriately to these challenges. Indeed, we will all do well to be reminded that; “It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable.” Collectively, as the broader public and private sector and communities, we must accept the responsibility to ensure that we play the role as the facilitators and enablers of the unlimited potential of our youth. We will gain from this investment in our youth through the production of socially responsible and active citizens that play a meaningful role in the development of their own communities.

Programme Director, I hope today’s Career Exhibition achieves the objectives that we set for ourselves in bringing together the exhibitors and youth in today’s activity. Allow me to express my appreciation to the organizers from all sectors who were involved in the preparation for today’s programme.

Allow me also to use this opportunity to wish all the learners and young people who are here the best of luck in their future endeavors.

I thank you.