

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the function to welcome Doctors trained in Cuba  
11 September 2009

The Head of Department –Dr Sbongile Zungu

Representatives from the SACP –Amabomvu

Cde Themba Mthembu

Cde Ronnie Bhengu

Human Resource Development Manager –Mrs Gugu Mkhize

Bursary Administrator –Mr Eugene Brooks

Our Medical Doctors trained in Cuba doing internship in SA

Aspirant Doctors departing for Cuba

Dear parents present

All protocol observed

We are here again to say congratulation to all the Medical Practitioners who when given an opportunity to study in Cuba, did so and made themselves; their parents and our country proud.

When I attended your graduation ceremony at the University of Limpopo two months ago I intended to bring along some gifts as a token of appreciation for what you have achieved but couldn't do so because of serious logistical impediments. Hence we have summoned you here again.

We also thought it wise to have you here today as we orient and bid farewell to the 15 students who will soon be departing to Cuba. We want you to use your experience, challenges and successes,

to enlighten your fellow compatriots so that they too can excel in that far away land.

For your achievements, our message is summed up by what our Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi said during your graduation ceremony at the Medunsa Campus in July 2009:

*'You must remember that your achievement today is not the end of the road of your struggle but the beginning of yet another phase of challenges in your working lives. It is the dawn of a new phase that comes with even greater responsibilities, that requires accountability, strategic leadership and adherence to the pledge – the Hippocratic Oath – that you made today to keep up ethics of medical profession.'*

We are glad to have you back and hope that you will impart and practice what you acquired in order to benefit the rural communities where most of you hail from.

I would like again to echo what Minister Motsoaledi pointed out that this *'is a profession that puts to the test your individual values of respect, dignity, care, passion and compassion, that you are expected to uphold at all times in your careers.'*

It may come as a surprise to you to learn that since 2004 the KwaZulu Natal Department of Health is faced with a total number of 329 Medico-Legal claims that amount to R368 million. All this has been unnecessary and could be avoided if we heed Minister Motsoaledi's words of wisdom. Some of the claims have to do with:

- Retained swabs and surgical instruments
- Surgical procedures not properly performed
- Incorrect or inaccurate diagnoses
- Incorrect medication administered, as well as,
- Vascular and orthopaedic injuries not timeously attended to.

We are appealing to you to work with us to give our people the respect and dignity they deserve. Always remember that Health is a Human Right! .

**Now for the benefit of our students, who will soon be leaving for Cuba, I want to say to you: Openly discuss, engage and deal with those things that endanger our participation in this progressive exercise, for instance:**

- Alcohol abuse among our students;
- Pregnancies and abortions;
- Stealing and fraudulent practices; as well as
- Getting involved in black market activities.

We want you to always remain good ambassadors for this country especially because we share an historical interconnectedness and good rapport with the Cuban soldiers that we shared trenches with in Angola.

We also want you, our departing students, to fully participate in the freedom celebrations and other social activities of that progressive country.

We strongly caution against bad mouthing of the Government of Cuba and its officials. Instead we want you to enrich yourselves by positively learning different languages, different cultures and different customs.

Always take into cognisance that as a country, we truly respect and appreciate the progressive and unselfish gesture of the Cuban Government and its people to unreservedly give our aspirant doctors time, expertise and positive energy to learn in that country and be allowed to come back to practice in South Africa, where they are needed.

I would conversely like to thank our officials – Eugene Brooks and your team in the Districts – who are directly responsible for the smooth running of this Cuban Project. We know that the

programme has not been without its concomittal challenges, some of which have cost us dearly. Notwithstanding all those challenges, together with those special moments which have made us celebrate the success of our children in a foreign environment, you have held it together. I would like to state that we deeply appreciate your commitment, dedication and diligence for those times when you are away from your family and friends and familiar surroundings. Continue to hold our flag high.

I THANK YOU ALL!