



health

Department of
Health
FREE STATE PROVINCE

**ADDRESS BY FREE STATE MEC FOR HEALTH, ES MABE, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE
PROVINCIAL NURSES ASSEMBLY, DIHLABENG TOWN HALL**

30 June 2010

Programme director
Executive mayor and other leaders in local government
Acting premier and MEC's present
Leadership of different political formations
The ANC Women's League
Acting head of department and officials of the department
Our nurses on whose name we are gathered here today
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Greetings to you all!

Allow me to heartily express my sincere gratitude to you all, for the opportunity accorded to me to share with you on this day what I consider to be a message of hope and a call towards harnessing all our efforts towards achieving a quality healthcare for all.

Gathered here today are nurses who in totality constitute a critical force for change in the health system in our province. Worth noting as well is the fact that it does not happen every day that their tireless efforts get recognised or rewarded by society.

Programme director, it is an established fact that our health system is faced with many challenges, which challenges we have clearly characterised during the recent provincial stake holders health summit.

What is pleasing though, is that all delegates at the summit came to a conclusion that we can overcome these challenges because our ten point plan as derived from the ANC's manifesto give us confidence that together with our communities we will triumph. We must drive the message home that, health cannot and must not continue to be treated as a political football.

Allow me to take you back down the history around which the noble nursing professional has been fashioned. When Florence Nightingale (the lady with the lamp) announced her decision to enter the nursing profession in 1845, despite intense anger and distress of her family, particularly her mother, she was rebelling against the expected role for woman of her status (she was born into a rich family) which was to become a wife and a mother. She worked hard to educate her in the art and science of nursing, inspire of opposition from her family and the restrictive societal code for affluent young English women, she responded to the divine calling.

She cared for people in poverty, travelled Europe and Africa (Egypt), and this is what she had to say about Africa, and the temple that she saw while sailing the Nile River:

"I do not think I ever saw anything which affected me much more than this.

Sublime in the highest style of intellectual beauty, a reflection of intellect without effort and suffering; not a feature is correct, but the whole effect is more expressive as spiritual glory or anything I could

have imagined. It makes the impression upon one that thousands of voices do, uniting in one unanimous simultaneous feeling of enthusiasm or emotion, which is said to overcome even the strongest man".

That's the effect images of the temple had on her, which may possibly have created the premonition that, a star might soon emerge from the continent.

Now, as though a nursing seed was carried through the Nile River waters down South into the Eastern Cape, in the Victoria district of Alice where Cecilia Makiwane was born.

Cecilia was raised and taught by her minister father before she entered school, just as was the case with Florence. Her skills were initiated and honed into the divine calling after her teachers training certificate.

I therefore say to you today, the gathering and ceremonies of this nature are truly symbolic events, at which exceptional individuals like you are worthy of direct recognition, but where at the same time we are all celebrating something much bigger.

In this instance, we are saluting a tradition of professional nursing in this province that stretches back for a century and still stands proud today, in a new climate and facing different horizons.

Cecilia Makiwane, despite her old fashioned Victorian appearance, remains a powerful symbol for our nursing profession at this time of transformation and she did so just seven years after professional nursing training first became available in this country.

From today's perspective, Cecilia Makiwane's life sounds commonplace or even dull. But viewed in the context of her times and the society in which she lived, she was quite extraordinary, just like you today!!

Cecilia Makiwane broke new ground. She was a pioneer and a transformer.

And clearly she had the staying power, the fire within her, which enabled her to complete the journey on which she set out. These are qualities that speak to many of us in this time of change and opportunity.

I would also guess, without really knowing this that her choice was strongly guided by a sense of morality and Christian values and to this day, the South African nursing profession bears the stamp of its roots.

The nursing profession in this present age of reconstruction and renewal is deeply reliant on two fundamental qualities suggested by the life of Cecilia Makiwane: a foundation of deeply held values and traditions and the ability to rise to new challenges and grasp new opportunities and above all, to undertake these actions in response to the needs of our people.

Our developmental approach demands that we respond vigorously to the reality that in good measure, we are confronted by a whole range of diseases and poverty. Our health intervention strategies must therefore be underpinned by a comprehensive programme aimed at the reduction and eradication of poverty.

I believe that the centrality of values and commitment demand greater recognition than ever in the light of the challenges that we currently face.

The question of the morale of the workers in health service requires to be addressed at a number of levels. In relation to nurse, the wage agreement of 1996 was a critical intervention but there is still a lot to be done to improve working conditions.

But unless there is a powerful belief in the value of the nobility of our mission, a revival of the sense of vocation, other changes are likely to be of short-lived value.

I believe that we derive a real sense of our significance and our duty if we view ourselves in the light of history. We have relatively recently put behind us a bitterly divided past, which degraded our humanity, and we are in the middle of a major exercise in transformation.

It is certainly not an easy exercise; it demands harder work than we ever know. The path is uncharted and uncertain and very few benefits are instant. But those of us who have committed ourselves to public service during this time should know that our effort is irreplaceable.

The private sector is often an extreme tempting option for skilled nursing professionals. The opportunity of work abroad, in Europe, the United States or the Middle East, may have great attraction, especially for those at the start of their careers.

As government, we would never seek to prevent the freedom of movement of our citizens and limit their right to market their skills freely. But I certainly do appeal to your sense of loyalty to this country.

I am sure that the delegate at today's assembly would be able to tell us that they too, have succeeded by building their services around quite ordinary actions done with genuine compassion.

Perhaps they would also tell us that the work often seems endless and the achievements unclear. But occasionally, a glimpse into the heart of someone that you have helped allows you to feel that your work is precious.

Programme director, I am certain that this gathering is convinced of the significance of the work that we essentially recognise here today. I would like to say to all gathered here that I feel profound respect for the contribution that you make to the welfare of our province. And I would like to recognise countless other nurses who stand just behind the members of their respective workplaces.

Our province and country needs you; it truly needs your strength, knowledge, skill and dedication. You are precious!

I thank you!