

***Address by KwaZulu-Natal Acting MEC for Economic Development & Tourism, Weziwe
Thusi during the Provincial Nelson Mandela Children's Career Expo held in
Pietermaritzburg on 13th February 2014***

Programme Director,
Members of the Provincial Legislature present,
Councillors and Representatives of traditional leadership,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
All protocols observed.

First I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our young people that sacrificed their valuable time to go and register for the forthcoming general elections on 7th May 2014. We know that the campaign to get each citizen with required age to participate in the polls has been marred by reports of apathy amongst the youth which has been attributed to various factors. But we are delighted that in spite of such concerns, our young people responded positively to the national call and we are grateful to your commitment to the entrenchment of democratic values in our country. Indeed, I will come back to this issue as it is very important in a young and fledgling democracy like ours.

As we all know, the world economy is still recovering from the rigours of the financial crisis that hit mainly advanced economies of North America, Europe and Japan – while emerging nations also got exposed to jittery market conditions. The recession which was more evident in 2008 and the subsequent years, hurt the job market as more people were ejected from employment – leading to growth in the armies of jobless people across the globe. According to the World Bank about 27 million people worldwide lost jobs during the recessionary years – leading to an estimated total of 200 million people being out of work by 2011 and the fear is that unless the global economy create around 600 million new jobs in the next ten years, this could have severe socio-economic repercussions especially that there would be more young people searching for employment in an already slow recovering global market.

Sadly, the contracted economies weren't only shedding jobs, but meant that no new opportunities could be created for school leavers and new graduates in particular – implying that young people were hard hit by the adverse economic situation hence even today we have scores of youth neither at school nor work. Though there are indications that the global economic scenery is slowly picking up, but we are not yet out of the woods as we have been informed this week that our employment figures have just recorded a minute improvement. Meanwhile the country's unemployment rate decreased very little from 24.50% to mere 24.10% in the last quarter of 2013 and this small positive development is attributed to amongst other things growth in the number of people turning to informal business – probably in response to dwindling creation of new job opportunities. About 64 thousand jobs were also reported to have been generated in the formal economy especially in the construction sectors and social services. The latter is often dominated by government sponsored initiatives directed at address poverty related challenges in the communities.

Unfortunately the said decline in the joblessness figures was observed in other provinces, particularly in the Eastern and Western Cape as well as North West while KwaZulu-Natal doesn't feature in this positive development as in the same period lost around 42 thousand jobs. Another concern is that while unemployment is a global phenomenon – with emerging economies experiencing even harsher realities, young people are in the main the major culprit. In this country for instance an estimated 48.2% to 70% of the overall total of jobless people, are young people between ages of 15 and 24 years and this regarded as the highest rate amongst middle income nations like ours.

The National Development Plan as a national socio-economic blue-print has enlisted the creation of employment as one of leading priorities that require collaborative efforts by government, business and civil organisations thus the target of ten million jobs to be generated by 2030 features prominently in this strategic document and is tied up to integrated skills development. This is indicative of government commitment to lift the economy out of the current doldrums created in the main by what is happening in the global scene and of course the history of our education system that condemned the majority of our people to inferior education that reduced the pool of adequately skilled personnel to ensure a competitive economy.

However, we are mindful that the private sector continues to be our reliable partner in the war against poverty, inequality and unemployment as many of our social partners in the industry continue to contribute to programmes directed at amongst other things the empowerment of young people with necessary skills to participate in the job market and contribute to the country's growth and competitiveness in the global market. Microsoft, but not alone, made a significant pledge late last year where they joined forces with government in the skills development programme for at least 3000 graduates that would be afforded opportunities to gain skills in the information technology fields to be able to actively carve their space in the fast-growing ICT sector.

It is for that reason that our government has in recent years escalated efforts directed at empowering young people with requisite skills and information to be able to secure business and employment opportunities amid the still subdued economic outlook in the country.

The government is certainly aware that the key in turning the current situation around hinges on a combination of interventions that have to be integrated for maximum impact. Central to this is investment of in a cost-effective education that is able to bring about meaning change in the lives of the people and ensure the nation's comparative advantage in the highly competitive world market. This is demonstrated in the amount of funds that the state continues to inject into higher education through the National Students Financial Aid Scheme which has seen significant increase from R3.1 billion in 2009 to almost R9 billion plus the R1 billion that was sourced from the National Skills Fund to address the ever growing demand for post-matric financial support by students from predominantly poor communities.

Around 1.4 million students had benefited from NSFAS since it was founded and with improving matric results each year, government would be forced to plough more resources to assist capable young people that are desperate to gain necessary skills and competencies essential in the building process of this country. Pretty impressive is that this funding has been substantially extended to FET colleges to broaden the skills training pool to feature highly sort after industry related technical skills as opposed to previous focus on the

university campuses that are currently bursting to the seams as a result of the traditional obsession with the university based education which was undermining the importance of diverse skills options offered by alternative academic centres such as FET colleges.

The importance of appropriate skills for the advancement of our economy and overall social improvement for our citizens couldn't be emphasize as most state owned agencies continue to add element of skills development in their portfolios. NYDA while its primary mandate is to instigate entrepreneurial appetite amongst young people, it had nevertheless structured its programmes to feature skills training to empower its beneficiaries with sound technical and business acumen to engage in sustainable and growing enterprises which guarantees the survival and sustainability of the business operations being funded by the agency and other financial institutions that are keen to fund youth initiated business operations. It's that reason that part of the agency's R392 million budget allocation for 2013/2014 financial covered skills development programmes directed at building up capacitated youth entrepreneurs that are groomed for active participation in the country's economy.

Our young people have to be empowered to confident seek their space in the business world and it has become in global trend that prospective business play learn their stripes through modest enterprises such as SMMEs and co-operative and we therefore encourage our youngsters that whilst gaining formal qualifications, they should consider venturing into business rather than targeting getting employment from existing enterprises. It is reported that more than half of the world economy is powered through small scale enterprises that creates more employment opportunities than the traditional big corporate. Government continues to make funds available for inspired youngsters but who have to be armed with required technical, management and marketing skills to be able to pursue successful and sustainable business ventures in the sectors they perceive offer more prospects for profitable and long term operations.

The forums such as this one, the Nelson Mandela Children's Career Expo were conceived to provide a meeting point for our young people in the province to access a wide range of information on various business and employment opportunities out there – either in the government or business spheres. But as stated we want to inculcate a culture that favours

entrepreneurial aptitude without forcing everyone into business as we appreciate that a vibrant economy could only be achieved and sustained where you have a new adventurous pool of young entrepreneurs who see business as an exciting career. It is therefore incumbent upon each and everyone of you to seize the opportunity by harvesting as much information as possible so that when you return to your respect homes you are more wiser than when you came here. We have private sector organisations and government agencies that have offered to be part of this campaign of empowering our province's youth with essential tool which is information on career options.

You are therefore urged to engage these organisations and where you couldn't secure all the details, you could access the same from individual websites as I am sure most of you have developed basic computer skills to be able to get into the internet and social networks that provide mines of information. There could be no better name to market these career exhibition galas than our own father of the nation the late former President Nelson Mandela who continues to inspire us all as the nation and the world around despite having lost him late last year.

Let his name spur and inspire you to dream high and identify means that could assist you to achieve your life long career ambitions. As children that have tasted the most of a democratic order in this country, there are high expectations for you to rise up and represent this country with finesse in the global stage and thus it's critical that you enmesh yourselves with necessary skills to prepare yourselves for challenges ahead. As stated above, the current economic conditions would subside in the not that far future and it's critical that we all prepare ourselves to seize the opportunities that often accompany the post-recession period.

The message we have for is a nice reminder! Youth are the future of this great nation and your active involvement in democratic processes such as the elections gives hope that as our generation phases out we will bequeath our illustrious nation to the safe hands of people that understand our socio-economic and political system that has to be protected for the benefit of generations to come. As mentioned at the beginning by giving yourself time to go and register you have done this country a marvellous favour and those that couldn't get their names in the voter roll, you still have time to do go to your nearest IEC offices have

your name enlisted in the role before the President, with constitutional powers vested upon declares the official election date in the government gazette.

In the face of losing their lives and long term imprisonment that was often characterised by inhumane physical and psychological torture, the youth of 1976 and the subsequent years, should serve as an inspiration for the current generation to feel obliged to work hard in ensuring that the achievements that had been recorded over the past twenty years are protected and use to build this nation that has become the role model for what is an ideal democratic society. Those who would be voting for the first time this year, congratulation for getting yourself into the voters' roll and we believe that your votes would further deepen our democracy that was attained after the loss of many lives and socio-economic deprivation endured by the majority of our people.

There could be no better celebration of the country's 20th anniversary of a democratic rule than having all our future leaders of this country endorse the entrenchment of freedom through participation in the election of the new government. Don't listen to those singing a false crescendo claiming that voting was fruitless as no change has been recorded since 1994. The fact is that this misleading campaign is being paddled by those who had enjoyed the right to vote in the past which unfortunately helped to perpetuate the inhumane system of apartheid. Conversely to their assertion that voting was waste of time, they are would be the first to swell the first queues leading to the ballot boxes where they would elect and put in place the government that you would regret later that it was not your ideal choice. It is up to you whether you allow other people to choose government for you or you grab the opportunity to influence the change that you want to see in a democratic society.

I thank you.

Mrs Ina Cronje
Acting MEC for Economic Development & Tourism