



Speech By

Ambassador Thembisile Majola, Deputy Minister of Energy

At the Learners Focus Week Opening Ceremony,

Tabernacle Church, Kimberley, Northern Cape on the

10th of July 2017.

Programme Director: Ms Bongwiwe Mbinqo Gigaba, MEC of Sports, Arts and Culture,

Ms. Martha Bartlett, MEC for Education,

Mr Mangaliso Matika, Mayor of Sol Plaatjie Local Municipality,

Professor Yunus Ballim, Vice Chancellor, Sol Plaatjie University.

SOE CEO and Chairpersons present,

Chief Executive Officers and representatives of energy companies,

Representatives of Tabernacle Church,

Exhibitors,

Our learners from various provinces,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to be with you today especially the learners, our young people and the future leaders, scientists, business people and politicians of our country. Young people constitute a large and rapidly growing proportion of the population in Africa, and South Africa is no exception, as well in many parts of the world as a whole. South Africa's population is largely made up of young people, with those below the age of 35 years

constituting about 66% per cent of the total population. As a big part of the population, young people are at the heart of the future of South Africa.

One of the major challenges facing youth today is unemployment. Youth unemployment is very high in South Africa. *58% of people aged 15-34 years old are not in employment, education or training – that's over 8.2 million people.* South Africa is in danger of missing out on the full potential of its young people. As a country we are not giving youth the skills they need to thrive in post-school. This can be seen in the rising youth unemployment rate, and the myriad of issues that disproportionately impact young people.

According to the International Labour Organisation South Africa is currently ranked 8th highest in the rate of unemployment in the world and will slide to 6th highest by 2020. This is also evident from Stats SA's recently released Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q1: 2017 which indicates that the country's overall unemployment rate of 27.7% has increased to its highest in 14 years - with Stats SA finding that the unemployment rate remained high among those with an education level of less than matric at 33.1%. The unemployment rate among graduates remained at 7.3%. These figures inform all of us that we need to do something. We need to encourage our youths to enrol in technical studies so that they can make meaningful contribution in their communities, to society and to economic growth and development. We are gathered here today, to meet with you the learners, because the Department of Energy, the Government of South Africa and the State Owned Companies, the oil majors and businesses represented here, care about youth development.

We are all aware that throughout our history the young people have always been impatient for change, and have played a critical role in bringing militancy and advancing the cause for liberation. It was the Youth League of the Mandelas, Lembedes, OR Tambos that was at the forefront of campaigns in 1955 that produced the Freedom Charter, and led by example with the formation of the Military Wing of the ANC, uMkhonto we Sizwe. This impatience, militancy and determination to take charge of their destiny of the youth, was once again demonstrated by young people, learners such as yourselves, through the Soweto uprising in 1976 in protest at the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. More recently young people voiced their demands for access to

higher education and demand solutions for the many challenges in modern day society. I believe you too can be masters of your destiny.

The Government has adopted National Development Plan which gives more emphasis on the economic growth and development through adequate investment in energy infrastructure with special focus on job creation and skills development especially for the youth. You, the industry stakeholders present today, we invite you to make a decisive contribution to the development of critical skills in the country which will meet your labour, innovation and growth needs now and in the future. I further invite you to become active partners of the Learners Focus Week initiative, a programme which contributes to skill development through provision of information and awareness on career opportunities in the energy sector, and rewards hard work and excellence.

The Learners Focus Week programme provides learners from disadvantaged communities with knowledge on the energy sector value chain. The Energy sector in particular has opportunities for young people with technical skills. This demand for technical skills is a global demand. Critical skills development in South Africa must be the business of all stakeholders, not government alone. Different companies operating in the energy sector will make presentations on their business, the career options they consider and the bursary opportunities on offer in respective companies.

In this year, dedicated to one of our countries greatest sons, Oliver Reginald Tambo, I want to remind all of us of the vision and deep commitment he had in the youth. I quote: "The children of any nation are its future. A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth and children, does not deserve its future."

The Department has a mandate to ensure secure and sustainable provision of energy for socio-economic development. The energy sector is crucial to the economic development and requires dynamic young people that can actively participate in enhancing innovation, technology and science in the sector. Skills shortage poses a serious threat to the country's long-term economic growth potential. With the growing energy infrastructure, skilled labour will be required to drive implementation of projects in the sector and develop the local value chain, grow manufacturing, project design, operations and maintenance. This is crucial if we to tackle unemployment systematically.

I take this opportunity to encourage all learners to consider career path in the energy sector so that we can speed up the pace of transformation. The sector requires skills such as artisans, electricians, technicians, nuclear technologist, environmentalists, researchers and scientists throughout the value chain. Learners gathered here today should use this opportunity to their advantage, and please continue to study hard and ensure that subjects in the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, calculus, chemistry, etc. are prioritised. The fourth industrial revolution should not pass us by, but must be harnessed to ensure that it's an opportunity to lift our youth and people out of poverty.

Most of the learners here come from disadvantaged communities and may not be aware of career opportunities in the energy sector. This programme is designed to empower learners with information that enables them to make informed choices regarding their career path. Having more young and skilled South Africans participating in the sector will ensure that the economy is stable and secure.

As a department, and in terms of skills development, Department of Energy has offered 47 training opportunities to learners and interns during the 2015-16 financial years. Out of these 47, 1 was appointed internally and 2 received jobs outside the Department during their time of training. The Department takes about 42 young people in the internship and learnership programme per year. Implementation of this target assists in up-skilling youth. As you go through the exhibition, talk to the different company representative to learn about the opportunities in their companies and what they are doing to alleviate the skills challenge and high unemployment facing the country.

In preparation of this programme, the Department engaged different partners to offer bursaries for some of the learners of the Learners Focus Week. This has been the highlight of the programme in the past. I urge all of the business leaders here today, to support the Department of energy that seeks to ensure that rural learners, who are the most marginalised, can, access higher education. Many of our children are seated at home because they don't have funding for higher education. The government, through NSFAS has allocated funding to more than 300 000 students in 2017 academic year. This allocation is for both universities and TVET colleges. This is huge investment in education. In January this year, the Department with its partners allocated 80 bursaries

to students in the Northern Cape. A total of 29 bursaries were awarded during the 2016 Learners Focus Week which was held at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. I thank all companies that have sponsored bursaries. I am hopeful that you will ensure that we exceed that number, this year. What we are doing is a direct response to the National Youth Policy 2020 which calls for the consolidation of youth initiatives to enhance the capabilities of young people to participate in the transformation of the economy and society.

Energy efficiency, global warming, environmental degradation remain critical concerns that require urgent action supported by the youth. The need to conserve the environment and create energy efficiency conscious society has become increasingly important. We have signed the Paris Agreement to deal decisively with impacts of climate change. The National Climate Change Response White paper outlines strategies to respond to the impacts of climate change. As part of the global commitment, South Africa is targeting an emissions trajectory of 34% below a “business as usual” case in 2020, 42% below in 2025. The country can only achieve this reduction with the involvement of young people. The Department will partner with youths formations to ensure much work is done to reduce carbon emissions throughout the value chain in the sector.

I want to see youth partnering with the Department in promoting and developing energy efficiency practices, contribute in developing energy efficiency policies, strategy and guidelines, facilitate information awareness, and capacity building campaigns on energy efficiency and environmental issues, promote energy for sustainable development, mitigate negative impact of energy utilization on environment, promote energy efficiency technologies, clean energy technologies and environmentally sound energy technologies. The energy projects you do should address some of these challenges.

I am also glad that amongst others we have champions in terms of 2016 matric results. Free State province got 88.2% in 2016 matric results. Northern Cape provinces moved from 69.4% to 78.8 % in 2016. North West also moved from 81.5% in 2015 to 82.5% in 2016. Other provinces such as Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal have also improved.

The Learners Focus Week and Exhibition will equip and empower you with information to make informed choices regarding your career choices in the energy space. This is important given the fact that energy sector is expected to double the generation capacity

in the coming years, and ensure an energy mix that ensures reliable, sustainable, accessible and affordable energy for our people and industry. Having more young South Africans skilled to pursue business and careers in the energy sector will ensure that the energy sector is stable and secure in the future, as well as create employment. Energy is at the heart of economic development and environmental sustainability of any country. Access to energy and the opportunities it offers is central to an inclusive energy growth strategy of a country, the world today and especially developing countries. I hope you will be inspired to take programmes that will enable you to join the energy sector.

Let me also talk about social challenges of today. Young people on the whole experience many societal and social problems as a result of rapid social change. You are bombarded with information overload via social media, the internet as well as main stream media. There is an increase in drug and alcohol use among youth leading to vandalism and disrespect toward their elders and authority. There also are the challenges of teenage pregnancies and school dropouts. Today, the highest rate of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections affect particularly youth below 25 years of age.

We need to address the root causes of many of these challenges facing our youth. Parenting cannot be delegated to teachers, who have a responsibility to educate and help shape responsible citizens. We hope we can contribute, in a meaningful way, to efforts aimed at informing, teaching, sharing real life experiences and solutions, as well as address the reality of implications of irresponsible sexual practices. The saying that information is power is indeed so. I trust you will leave the week long Learners Focus Week Programme more knowledgeable, a little wiser and better armed to make take charge of your lives, of your destiny.

In conclusion, let me thank all our learners for the hard work and a special thank you to the educators who have a huge responsibility, and are key in ensuring our learners are prepared for life as responsible students and young adults. Let me also thank the provincial governments who have partnered with us, especially our host province, district and municipality. Special thanks to the University management that is hosting our learners and ensuring that they get a feel of campus life. Thank you to our partners in the private and public sector, the presenters and exhibitors for making this occasion what it is now. I specially thank the Tabernacle Church for graciously opening its doors to all of us today. Together, we can indeed move South Africa forward and build a better tomorrow.

I thank you.

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