

## **Address At The National Teaching Awards Ceremony**

Presidential Guest House, 10 October 2002

Master of Ceremonies,  
Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal,  
Deputy Minister, Mr. Mosibudi Mangena,  
Director-General of the National Department of Education and officials,  
MEC's,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tonight we are celebrating yet another important occasion of the National Teaching Awards. I am therefore happy that once again, I am able to celebrate with all the distinguished guests gathered here today as we congratulate our colleagues and fellow South Africans in their exemplary achievements.

This ceremony is important not only in its significance to individual teachers, but particularly because it offers all of us an opportunity to celebrate dedication and excellence in the teaching profession.

Through these awards, we acknowledge and rejoice on the attainment of the best quality and high standards of teaching as well as striving to encourage many others in this profession, to aspire to these good attributes that should in reality define the work of each and every teacher in all our schools.

Tonight we also celebrate the ten teachers - recipients of these very awards - who because of their outstanding work represented our country internationally. As you are aware, six of these teachers participated in the Japanese Youth and Women Development Programme for a period of a month and an additional four teachers received the Fulbright Scholarship for teacher exchange for a period of a year.

Again, congratulations. I hope and trust that the invaluable experience and knowledge that you gathered in these foreign encounters will assist our children so that they also strive to emulate and even surpass your good work.

I also hope that you, the recipients of these awards, will, through your work, motivate and encourage many of your colleagues to work even harder so as to improve on the excellent example that you have set for all of us.

Clearly, the message that these awards are sending to the rest of the country is that we have begun an important process of bringing out the best in many of our teachers, such that they are real catalysts for change and the transformation of our society.

Indeed, teachers are central to our common efforts to address the imbalances and deficiencies occasioned by the legacy of our unfortunate past.

Through the Early Childhood Development, Adult Basic Education and Training as well as South African Literacy Initiative and many others, we have the necessary policies to redress the disparities brought about by decades of apartheid education.

The Early Childhood Development offers us an opportunity to give many South African children the firm base needed for better education. As we know, most of these children never had such a chance.

In addition, the Adult Basic Education and Training presents many amongst our people who, for various reasons, were not able to attend school or further their studies, with opportunities for development.

These policies are essential pillars as well as the necessary and critical foundations in our Human Resource Development Strategy and are crucial in ensuring lifelong learning.

Yet, while these policies are important, it is through the extra efforts and selflessness of teachers that we, as South Africans, will rectify the inequities of the past and together realize the common goal of providing education for all our fellow citizens.

As we are all aware, for our country to make the necessary and meaningful progress with regard to the many socio-economic challenges that we face, we need skilled and appropriately trained people. Obviously, the foundation for an ideal society with adequately skilled men and women, capable of bringing about all-round development, is rooted in the sound education and training system.

This, in turn, is predicated on the availability of sufficiently dedicated teachers who regard their profession as a calling. These type of teachers will be alive to the fact that the onerous demands of today are mitigated by the knowledge that amongst the products from his/her classroom will surely be tomorrow's engineers, scientists, technicians, economists and other important leaders that will help to develop our country and improve the conditions of all our people.

At the beginning of this year we called on the people of South Africa to go an extra mile in our joint effort for a better life, in the spirit of Letsema and Vuk'uzenzele (Arise and Act).

We have been inspired by the thousands of volunteers that converged to schools, clinics and police stations to clean these important institutions and offer other services. In this regard, I am aware that there are many teachers who, for many years have been going an extra mile, volunteering their time and expertise especially after normal school hours and over weekends, to assist our children.

In addition, many other teachers have volunteered their valuable time and worked harder, after our call early this year, ensuring that learners and students benefit from the selfless acts of these volunteers. I would like to take this opportunity sincerely to thank you for the positive response to our Letsema call and for having made various important contributions to take us further on our path towards a better life.

Clearly, this is an important element of the work that we have to do if our efforts are to make a difference in our quest for a transformed, developed and prosperous South Africa.

Accordingly, I would like to make an appeal again, to all of us, to make Letsema programme part of our daily work, ensuring that everyday is a Letsema day and that the spirit of Vuk'uzenzele becomes part of the ethos that will help to improve the quality of our education.

Our country and continent are faced with many challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and catching up with the developed world especially on the important issue of modern technology, which is the driving force of today's economies.

We know that to bridge the technological divide between our country and the rest of the world, we need teachers who are, themselves, technologically advanced and are continuously engaged in a process of improving their capacity so as to be in a better position to impart the relevant skills to learners.

Of importance, is for all of us to improve the performance of learners in the critical subjects such as mathematics and science. In this regard, teachers are obviously central and we support Minister Asmal on his intention to go on a massive recruitment campaign for students who excel in mathematics and science to join the teaching profession. This is in addition to on-going programmes to train, retrain and improve the competence of current teachers so as to serve learners better.

At the same time, we need to enlist the assistance of many people in our communities who are capable of helping learners to master these critical subjects. An important part of this critical force in our communities is the many retired teachers who, on several occasions, have indicated that they are available and ready to assist.

We also need to organize the many skilled people in our communities to volunteer their time and work with teachers and parents to improve the education of our people. Teachers and parents should be at the forefront of this important process that will surely be to the benefit of our society.

I am saying therefore, that we need to begin a vibrant movement around education that will mobilize various sections of our communities to play their role in accelerating the pace of ensuring excellence in our education and improving the performance of our learners.

Furthermore, as we grapple with the critical challenge of building a South African nation that is defined by a common and unified perspective and bound by the resolve to reach a cherished destination of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society, education can and must play a central role.

Accordingly, we should put in place educational programmes that are aimed at assisting the project of nation-building. These programmes should be sustainable with clear and measurable targets.

We have a duty to ensure that South Africans speak the languages of their neighbours, that all us can sing together and dance to the same tune in all our official languages. Clearly, we should ensure that the consciousness of each one of us is informed by the idioms and proverbs of our diverse languages. When we begin to move in the same direction in these important matters, we will know that our dream of a unified nation has in reality only begun to take shape.

Education is central to this important matter. Again, we can only succeed if we involve the parents and communities from which our learners come from.

The challenges are many and the tasks seem daunting. Yet, we have demonstrated in the past that as South Africans we succeed when odds appear to be against us. We prevail when we are not given any chance. Like the teachers that we honour tonight, South Africans overcome the most formidable of obstacles and excel in unfavorable conditions.

Indeed, these distinguished teachers that we are celebrating their good work, have shown a typically South African spirit. Because of your inspiration, from today we should refuse to countenance any mediocrity. From today we should proudly acknowledge our South Africanness when we perform and excel like yourselves.

I am sure we will all agree that dedication, passion for excellence, selflessness, hard work and perseverance should be the distinguishing attributes of everyone who calls himself/herself South Africans.

Finally, I will like to say to the teachers that are receiving their awards today: 'Lux tua ita luceat' - let your light so shine before all of us that we can all see your good work.

I thank you.

Issued by the Presidency.