

# **KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON MEC NONKOSI MVANA AT THE SOCIAL WORK ETHICS CONFERENCE IN PORT ELIZABETH, 05-06 AUGUST 09**

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I greet you all

I want to express my sense of gratitude for the honor you have given me by being part of this conference. I hope that the next two days will indeed renew our commitment as social service professionals to deliver services in a better, humane and diligent manner.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Social Work profession has developed over the years in South Africa since the establishment of the first school of social work called the Jan H Hofmeyr school of Social Work in 1941, in Johannesburg with its first graduates like the late Ellen Khuzwayo, the late Joshua Nkomo and our former first lady Mrs. Madikizela Mandela.

## **SOCIAL WORK MANDATE**

The real test of the profession's contribution lies in its response to the communities' diverse needs. Social workers are the first port of call for families in distress. Many social policy makers and analysts believe that, the social work profession has always focused more on the protection of the most vulnerable people and the promotion of human rights issues whilst others believe that the profession also has a central role to play in the attainment of national and international priorities such as the Millennium Development Goals. This assertion challenges us to seriously look into a developmental role for social work.

As social work professionals, we are mandated to advance principles of social justice by creating opportunities for people to be self-reliant and mitigate against social ills like poverty, unemployment, high

number of orphaned and vulnerable children and high rates of abuse of women and children. Your mandate as professionals should be to promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people.

Programme Director, as Social Service Professionals, we cannot be immune from knowing the impact of the political arena on practice. In doing that, we are called to advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

## **ETHICAL CONDUCT AND VALUES**

If we want to uphold ethical and moral standards, social service professionals have legitimate moral obligations. In their application of technical knowledge and the proper consideration of socio-economic factors, the social service professionals must properly balance the value obligations to each of the four which are; the practitioner should be loyal to the employer, honest with the client, respectful of the profession, and sensitive to the health and safety of the public. Ethical conduct, or professional decision-making, is then a necessary requisite to being called a professional. A professional must be able to properly balance competing values in making decisions that affect both society and the client, especially where personal, societal, and cultural values conflict.

## **CHALLENGES AND INTERVENTIONS**

The current socio-economic challenges in our country calls for a revised training of social workers. We need the cooperation of institutions of higher learning to re-look at the way training is provided and devise means to accelerate the training of social workers to meet the increasing demand for services. We are still battling with the shortage of social service professionals, which hinders the department's ability to meet the increasing demand for developmental social services.

Recognizing the central role of the profession in the attainment of national priorities such as poverty alleviation and social cohesion, social work has been declared a scarce skill in South Africa. As a department, we have decided to invest in our young people by availing financial assistance in a form of

bursary and scholarship so as to attract them to this scarce skill. We need to do more to attract young men to this profession.

## **CONCLUSION**

I wish you well in your deliberations. Our communities cannot continue to be deprived of their basic human right to services which is enshrined in our constitution. When we serve them, we must remember the principles of Batho Pele.

I thank you