

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON MEC SAM KWELITA AT THE
INAUGURAL SOCIAL WORK AWARDS IN EAST LONDON, 31
OCTOBER 2008**

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL WORK VETERANS

NOMINEES

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I greet you all

I want to join in the celebration of those we honor tonight. When you honor people, you are of course giving a form of recognition to the people being honored. But, in a very real sense, it is the rest of us who are being honored by their presence and by their participation. It is also true that honors and awards like these not only recognize individual excellence, but recognize the examples set by the people being honored here in the value we attach to the activity of public service. And I know I speak for all who are honored tonight in saying that as we celebrate their selfless contribution, we give hope to the rest of our citizens to say there are still people who will go an extra mile to ensure that services are rendered.

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. As South Africans, we are greatly honoured to mention but a few the first group of social workers like the late Ellen Kuzwayo, the late Joshua Nkomo, one of the political stalwarts from Zimbabwe and Mamu Winnie – Madikizela. Notwithstanding the sacrifices many individual humble social workers make to deal with the social ills in our society, social workers remain largely ignored in society. Today, we are reaping the rewards of their selfless sacrifice to the socio – economic upliftment of our communities.

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.

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. Currently, our Provincial Department is sitting at 765 social workers of which 75 of them are women. We need to do more to attract young men to this profession. In terms of our professional standards and norms, we are still behind because we have one social worker serving 6000 people instead of one social worker equals to 3000 people.

CONCLUSION

Programme Director, we celebrate their courage and perseverance. We cheer them on to persevere in their quest for excellence. We celebrate this deep sense of mission and duty in serving our communities. Our award recipients' passion and perseverance inspire and set new standards for us. They have helped to raise our Department's standards. It is often said that a "high tide raises all boats". Our winners' accomplishments impact and uplift the whole Department.

I thank you