

## ***SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF DSD, MS BATHABILE DLAMINI, AT THE NATIONAL SUMMIT ON MDGS***

Wednesday, 01 September 2010

Topic: Consolidation & Coordination of Poverty Eradication and Strategies to Achieving MDG 1 (Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger)

31 August 2010

Programme Director, Esteemed invite speakers, All participants and delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you on this important occasion, which brings us together to assess our progress and strategies towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In our assessment, we must acknowledge that hunger and poverty are critical challenges that remain rooted in our communities, affecting mostly women and young people.

This adverse situation was recently exacerbated by the global economic meltdown, which also had negative effects on economies in the developing world, including South Africa. In our context, it is troubling that the economic downturn manifested into many job losses, leading to rising unemployment rates and poverty.

In addition, we also bear witness to child-headed households, which often lead to children dropping out of school or living in the streets. These are some of the factors that have guided government's response to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty. We, in the ruling party, the African National Congress, have already proclaimed that a "national democratic state should continually implement integrated anti-poverty programmes, ensuring that these programmes address not only social assistance, but also sustainable integration of all communities into economic activity."

It is for this reason that government's response to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger has been comprehensive, combining cash transfers with social wage packages. This includes free primary health care for all, compulsory education for children aged between seven and thirteen as well as and human settlements for the poor. Thus the ANC acknowledges, in its Strategy and Tactics Document that, "the state has massively expanded access to welfare grants; and their social wage includes such elements for the poor as free and compulsory education, free health care, free basic services, and assets provision through the housing and land reform programmes".

Government's most successful strategy in combating abject poverty and its ever present companion, hunger is its Social Assistance Programme that provides relief to over 14 million South Africans. The majority of the beneficiaries are children who receive the e Child Support Grant (CSG). Eligibility for this grant, which currently stands on R240 per child per month, is restricted to poor children, with most recipients being women.

Most of these recipients are usually mothers or anyone acting as the child's primary care-giver, which is critical because many children are cared for by relatives as a result of the impact of HIV and AIDS. This year, we extended the CSG to eligible children between the ages of 15 and 16, and we will raise this in phases to include children who will turn 18 years old in 2012. The cash transfers have largely been credited with a reported decrease in people experiencing hunger. According to the General Household Survey, 20% of children and 25% of adults said that they were hungry 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' in 2002. By 2007 this was reduced to 12.2 percent of children and 10.6 of adults, again largely due to the social assistance programmes.

Our comprehensive response is inspired by the truth that resonates in words of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mother Teresa, that: "we think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty

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of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty”.

We must learn from these words in our efforts to create a caring society in the context of eradicating hunger and poverty. In this regard, we must look ahead with the view of ending reliance of social grants. Among other things, we must encourage and help young mothers, no matter how poor, to go back to school.

Children of school going age in our communities must all be in school, regardless of the poverty situation they may live in. The Integrated Nutrition Programme and the Primary School Feeding Scheme have proven to be some of the successful programmes that have an impact in eradicating poverty and hunger among poor children. Therefore, we must ensure that these initiatives are exploited by the desired beneficiaries, especially for school children to pursue their education.

We must do this with an understanding that poverty is entrenched in South Africa, which gives us the responsibility to fight it especially inter-generational poverty. On this note, it becomes important that our interventions focus more specifically on families and individuals within households.

Programme Director, Allow me to pose this important question that is asked in my political home:” is society mobilised for faster progress?” In answering this question, we must know the reality that we need the involvement of different role-players in society to achieve the task of meeting the MDGs. In April this year, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe remarked for example at the Association of Commonwealth Universities Conference, that “Africa cannot achieve the development envisaged in the MDGs without increasing participation rates, deepening quality, and growing a vibrant new generation of researchers actively engaged with the social, scientific and economic challenges of the region.”

Indeed, we need holistic activism from all spectrums, driven by respective strengths and competencies, to root out the manifestations of hunger and poverty in our communities. I must therefore mention that “the dictum that the people are their own liberators remains as relevant today as it was during the days of anti-apartheid struggle.”

This requires that we build a social movement based on unity, which drives all of us to understand that fighting poverty is the responsibility of all South Africans, not government alone. This is the kind of approach that we have seen during the recession, which saw the collaboration between government, labour and business at NEDLAC level, to find a comprehensive response to the economic crisis.

I must however, stress the leading role that governments must play in fighting the scourge of poverty and hunger. I recently travelled to Brazil to sign cooperation agreements on Social Development and Social Security. Brazil has already met some significant MDG targets largely due to its Zero Hunger Programme that integrates Social Assistance Programmes, mass based feeding programmes and support to a range of small food producers including family farms.

In discussions with Ministers there and confirmed in speech by President Lula at the launch of Food and Agriculture Organisation’s 1 billion signature campaign against global hunger was the need for state to lead initiatives to fight poverty and hunger. The approach by the Brazilian leadership is that the nourishment of people is too important an issue to be left to the market alone. The results have been impressive. When Lula first took office in 2003, 12 percent of Brazil’s 190 million people were living in extreme poverty – or less than US\$1 a day.

That figure is now 4.8 percent, meaning Brazil has already achieved one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals set in 2000: to halve extreme poverty by 2015. The number of poor Brazilians fell from near 43 percent in 2003 to close to 30 percent now, or 24 million Brazilians, according to the government.

We seek to emulate that success. We have one pillar of the Zero Hunger Campaign in place, which is the Social Assistance Programme I alluded to earlier. We need to explore ways of rolling out universal school feeding schemes, the establishment of Popular Restaurants that serve quality food to poor people at

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reasonable prices in environments that restore their dignity and, *indeed* support the small and family farms that supply these establishments with the required produce. To do this effectively the state needs the support of civil society and the buy-in of the business community. We need to make the end of hunger in South Africa our national passion and translate it into a mass based campaign. We will engage with all relevant stakeholders on this initiative over the next few months.

These are also key partners who worked with government at this forum on the Anti-Poverty Strategy. It is this spirit of social solidarity that must reign in our pursuit for the common good. We need to align programmes of government and its social partners to ensure that we all get the desired outcome.

I want to wish you well in your further deliberations in this summit. I am confident that your discussions will culminate into positive and constructive resolutions that will help our country meet the MDGs.

I thank you

