

Keynote Address by the Hon Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Hon Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, on the occasion of the Prize Giving Ceremony, Mzomhle High School, Mdantsane. East London. 2012 October 11th.

Program Director

Members of the SGB

The Principal and Teachers

Parents

Members of the Mzomhle Alumni

Honoured Guests

Over the past few months our country has been plagued by a sense of doom and gloominess with riots and strikes affecting key sector of or society. While some of these are to be expected as a form of workers' way to champion their rights, what has been regrettable has been the resultant loss of life and so much distraction of infrastructure and assets. We hope that various parties to the dispute can find a solution to the impasse as soon as possible to allow for normality to return to the affected parts of our country.

Given this air of negativity, it was therefore a breath of fresh air to be invited to an event aimed at celebrating and rewarding excellence amongst our young people.

In particular it is always a special occasion for me to visit Mzomhle High School and the people of Mdantsane, because the school itself holds a significant place in my own life and that of my family. So, to come and celebrate with you here, and to share a few words with the learners and the parents, is always a perfect excuse to be away from the bustle and hustle of Johannesburg.

I am very glad that we Mzomhle and I have committed to a long term relationship and I am particularly proud of the achievements that have been made here in part as a result of our association and working together.

I seem to remember that when we initially started discussions on the kind of assistance the school requires, we were all limiting ourselves to the needs for infrastructure and equipment, but I am glad that over time we have had projects here aimed at improvement of the education offering and the incentives for those learners who have done well. This aspect of partnership is important and I am glad that we can be here to share in such an achievement for the school.

Building a good work ethic amongst children and rewarding for good results is likely to make a positive contribution to the kind of adults they are going to be. Children who work hard and excel in school are most likely to become responsible, honest and hard working adults.

A positive message that “hard work pays out” should be instilled in our children and to teach them to desist from taking short cuts in life.

I am actually reminded about a funny conversation between a child and his mother after he came back from school with a FAIL on his report card:

The mother asked her young son; “Why did you get such a low mark on that test?” and the son responded: “because of absence!”

And then the mother asks “Do you mean to tell me that you were absent on the day of the test?”; and the boy answered: Oh no, I was not absent, but the kid who sits next to me was.”

Certainly this is the kind of attitude we do not want children to have towards their work, and therefore for us as parents and teachers our tasks is to be steadfast on encouraging good honest hard work.

Program Director,

For our country to remain a key economic player in the face of an increasingly global competitive environment, we depend on our children and the quality of education they receive.

A strong and responsive public education system is therefore the main pillar for our country and our people’s future. This is because the public education system is responsible for the education of the bulk majority of our children.

If we can't pay attention to ensuring that the public education system works and works well, the result is a bleak future for millions of our children; creating a future where the majority of those children will not be economically active.

The only way we move away from our conditions of poverty, from a high dependence on welfare, is to make schools like this to work and to achieve high levels of excellence.

Having said that, the task of reorganising and fixing our public education system is an involved one, and cannot only be done by schools themselves; or through government efforts alone for that matter.

It is for this reason that we should applaud the partnerships such as the Plant-Back Initiative, the Mzomhle Alumni and the National Research Foundation for their collaboration with Mzomhle to make this prize giving ceremony a reality.

I am personally proud to be associated with former learners of this school who have taken it upon themselves despite their busy schedules to make time to assist the school.

We need more partnerships in this regard, and I am inviting other members of the community to also look at what kind of contributions they can make both individually and as groups. It does not necessarily have to be about money.

It could be that some of you who are retired teachers can assist with extra classes. Many can contribute with other skills and make available their time to support the school.

We also can't emphasise enough the value of the contribution of parents in their children's school life. Bringing up a child is a full value chain that includes their home life, community and school interaction.

Finally, let me congratulate each and every learner who has done well here today, and to urge you to improve on your current successes and strive to be better all the time. Challenge yourself beyond your own capabilities, knowing that the circumstances of your surrounding do not have to define you.

For those of you who are not receiving awards to day, let the success of your fellow learners encourage you and let it feed your confidence that if they can do it, so can you. After all they are just ordinary children from Mzomhle High, just like you are.

Many opportunities await you and we as a community are having high expectations of you. In fact personally, I will invite the SA National Defence Force to come and conduct a career expo for schools in this region so that you can also be exposed and maybe have interest in joining Defence.

We are building a Defence Force that is modernised and designed to be at the cutting edge of our nation's innovation in research and technology. Gone are the days when children were allowed to abandon school and feel that they will be allowed to join the Military. The Military is no longer the place to dump the worst that society has, it is the place where the best we have are recruited.

Our Air force needs the best pilots and airmen, our navy has outstanding programs in maritime engineering fields and we need the best medical professionals and engineers for at the SA Military Health Services. The weaponry we use in the Army is at the top of technological innovation and they are designed and operated by this new type of soldiers that we are training.

The good thing about being part of your generation is that the dawn of democracy has given you more opportunities and unlimited possibilities that many of the former learners of this school never had. Don't waste it.

I wish all the success!

Thank you