

Opening remarks by the MEC for Health & Social Development, Mme Dikeledi Magadzi at the National Non-Communicable Diseases Summit on the 12th day of September 2011, Birchwood Hotel & Conference Centre.

Minister of Health, DR. Aaron Motsoaledi

Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa

MEC's for Health from all the provinces of South Africa

Director General for Health

Heads of Departments at the provincial sphere of government

Health workers and specialists present here

Distinguished Summit delegates

Invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme Director,

On behalf of the National Ministry of Health, I am pleased to welcome all of you to this very important summit on Non-Communicable Diseases and thank you most sincerely for responding to our invitation to join us here over two days.

It stands to reason that what has brought us here today is a shared concern to ensure that South Africa and the rest of the world achieves all the health related millennium development goals.

These include the need to respond to the challenges we face as a result of non-communicable diseases and to mitigate its impact on the millions of our people, most of whom are poor; marginalized and found at the most rural areas of our country with limited access to health care.

This important summit is taking place during a very challenging period when all countries of the world are in a grip of a serious health crisis regarding the increasing mortality and burden resulting from non-communicable diseases accounting to about 60% of all deaths.

According to the first World Health Organization (WHO): Global Status Report on Non-Communicable diseases, 36.1 Million people died in 2008 from conditions such as heart disease, strokes, chronic lung diseases, cancers and diabetes, saying nearly 80% of these deaths occurred in low and middle income countries.

Commenting on this crisis, WHO Director General Margaret Chan said:

“The rise of chronic non-communicable diseases presents an enormous challenge and for some countries, it is no exaggeration to describe the situation as an impending disaster; a disaster for health, for society and most of all for national economies”

I am sure you would agree with me when I say, South Africa cannot afford to plunge into a disaster of this magnitude as described by the Director General of the WHO.

We are therefore gathered here, at this particular summit on non-communicable diseases to find solutions to the challenges that we face in the health sector and to secure a long and healthy life for all South Africans.

It is, indeed, time for the real hard work of healing South Africa and all her people and to reverse the growing increase in non-communicable diseases as they are largely preventable, manageable and curable.

These we can only achieve if we all of us become frank and honest in the deliberations during this summit with sufficient tolerance to respect everybody's point of view and to allow all voices to be heard. Most of you would know that had we, as a people ignored this basic civilized precepts during the fall of the apartheid regime we would have never achieved the much-acclaimed South African miracle of which all our people are justly proud.

Let me remind you therefore, that we are expected at the end of this summit to have achieved the following goals:

- Ensure that South Africa is united and well prepared for the High Level United Nations General assembly Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases;
- Provide analysis of the current South African situation with regard to Non-Communicable Diseases and propose solutions on how to reduce incidence and prevalence through comprehensive and inter-sectoral interventions;

- Assist in the realization of the Negotiated Service Delivery Agreement to increase life expectancy and
- Develop a declaration on strategies and targets to be reached in South Africa in a concerted effort to improve the NCD's situation.

It is in this regard, distinguished delegates; ladies and gentlemen that we welcome you to this important summit, convened to discuss a grave problem such as non-communicable diseases.

We are pleased that you are here because we count on you as a critical component part of the 'new cadre' mobilized to engage in struggle against non-communicable diseases confronting our people not only in South Africa but throughout the world.

Accordingly, I am certain that each and every one of us will do the right things and spare no effort and or thought to ensure that everything necessary for a truly successful summit is done on time, and preferably ahead of schedule, meeting all the intended expectations.

I can say with certainty that the battle against non-communicable diseases can be won for as long as we are united in action in dealing those aspects of our lives that contribute to its rise.

We must all do our part during this summit to contribute thoughts, skills and experiences not only to identify risk factors associated with the NCD's but to develop strategies that will assist us in dealing with this challenge decisively before it reach the "impending disaster" level which Margaret Chan warned us about.

One more, I welcome you all at this important summit, convinced that you would not have come here, unless you were messengers of hope deployed to against NCD's and its impact on the health profile of majority of our people in our land and indeed across the globe.

We would like to thank you sincerely for your presence and participation which in itself constitute a tribute to the millions of people and the family of nations. Your positive response to our invitation signifies a profound statement of hope that all of us will contribute to expand the frontiers human dignity through among others the provision of quality health care to all our people.

I wish all delegates a successful summit and trust that by the end of the session, we would have proudly developed a declaration of hope and declared war against the increasing levels of non-communicable diseases.

Forward we go and we shall not surrender!

On behalf of the Ministry of Health, in particular the Minister of health Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi and his deputy Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa I welcome you to Birchwood: Non-Communicable Diseases Summit.

I thank you.