

**Address by National Commissioner Zach Modise at the launch of
67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day in Correctional Services
Zonderwater Correctional Centre
7 August 2015**

Programme Director

Chief Deputy Commissioner for Incarceration and Corrections: Mr. James Smalberger

The Acting Regional Commissioner of Gauteng: Mr. Mandla Mkabela

Other Distinguished Chief Deputy Commissioners and Regional Commissioners

Senior Managers from the Ministry and Sister Departments Present

Mr Sello Hatang from the Nelson Mandela Foundation

Ms. Carolyn Steyn from 67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day

Ms. PJ Powers

Our Partners and Service Providers in the Corrections Business

Community Leaders and Activists

Our Offenders

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

The 2015 Nelson Mandela Day, commemorated last month, reiterated a call to action, and an affirmation, for all South Africans to work together for the continuous development of humanity. Guided by the message of this year's Nelson Mandela Day, ***Take Action; Inspire Change; Make Every Day a Mandela Day***, citizens are being encouraged to make a change in their respective communities, by donating time to help others, and make our country a better place for all.

Almost every day, alongside correctional officials, offenders, across the country, are giving back to society in some form. This includes cleaning, renovating and painting schools, orphanages and old age homes, by repairing taps, baths, ceilings, windows and walls. Under-privileged families, and children, receive fresh produce, in the form of vegetables, milk and meat, grown, and cultivated, by offenders at our correctional centre farms. Throughout the year, there are many more activities where offenders, and ex-offenders, are actively engaged in mending their

former ways by giving back to society through a variety of programmes. We must acknowledge efforts by offenders towards paying back their debts to society.

Madiba led the way in transforming our prisons into correctional centres, when he became our first democratically elected President. As the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), we will continue to work hard at creating, what Madiba calls, “a culture that will motivate offenders to become law-abiding and productive citizens [because] they need to be re-integrated back into the community [since] we want them to contribute to the good of all’.

In *Mandela’s Way*, his biographer, Richard Stengel whom Mandela referred to as his son, draws our attention to this difficult fact about prison as having been probably Mandela’s greatest teacher: “Nelson Mandela had many teachers in his life, but the greatest of them all was prison. Prison moulded the man we see today and know today. He learned about life and leadership from many sources: from his rather distant father; from the king of the Thembu, who raised him like his son; from his stalwart friends and colleagues Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo; from historical figures and heads of state like Winston Churchill and Haile Selassie; from the words of Machiavelli and Tolstoy. But the twenty seven years he spent in prison became the crucible that both hardened him and burned away all that was extraneous.

“Prison taught him self-control, discipline, and focus – the things he considers essential to leadership – and it taught him how to be a full human being”.

In August 1998, when DCS opened the Emthonjeni Youth Centre, President Mandela personally came and spoke to young offenders about the value of education. He urged young offenders to, “Grasp the opportunity before you - such opportunities are rare. Your destiny is in your hands... Make this the turning point in your life. We are developing this kind of institution because we have confidence in what you can become. Through dedication, hard work and commitment they can help themselves. In doing so they will also help counter the atmosphere of entitlement that is too often leading young people to abuse what we are doing to equip our youth to become the leaders of tomorrow”.

DCS has made education, and training, of offenders in our facilities a priority. Madiba is our source of inspiration because, he asserts that, education is the great engine of personal development. Probably referring to his own experience of education, and commitment to freedom and justice, he describes the value of education so beautifully in these words: “A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special”.

Also of significance was Mandela’s call for communities to resist the pitfall of stigmatising offenders and ex-offenders. “We all need to join hands to rescue these youngsters and transform them into worthy and respected citizens of our country [because] we owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves. They are part of our society's problem and rejecting them is not going to solve the problem of crime. They are human beings too, they are our brothers, sisters, our sons and daughters who have disappointed us. They have the right to a chance to unlock their potential to better themselves”.

67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day is another initiative through which our former President still touches the hearts of South Africans, and makes them aware of the importance of looking after those less fortunate.

Their motto is to “Stitch by stitch keep thousands upon thousands of people less fortunate than ourselves warmer over all the winters to come, in the name of our beloved Nelson Mandela”.

DCS is proud to partner with 67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day. This initiative was first introduced to DCS, here at Zonderwater. On 17 April 2015, offenders from Zonderwater personally handed over 400 blankets they had made at a special handover ceremony. Thus far, DCS has completed, and handed over, approximately 700 blankets to 67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day. This programme has been very well received in correctional centres. We are now working towards formalizing the relationship, so that the programme can be effectively and efficiently rolled out to more correctional facilities across the country.

In addition to donating blankets to needy communities, this partnership will also enable DCS to facilitate skills development by training offenders on the skill of crocheting; enable offenders to realize their full creative potential through nurturing their creativity, expression and innovation; provide a tool for offender development, and prepare them for reintegration back into their communities.

As a skilled and creative occupation, the craft of crochet also has therapeutic benefits including:

- The repetitive movements while crocheting can relieve stress;
- Crocheting helps to calm the mind; and
- Crocheting has significant psychological, and social, benefits, which can contribute to well-being and quality of life.

In conclusion, on behalf of DCS, allow me to quote from an offender here at Zonderwater: “We are knitting together broken lives, knitting together broken trusts. With this project we are finding our humanity again”.

Finally, let us all ***“Take Action; Inspire Change; Make Every Day a Mandela Day!”***

THANK YOU.