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**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SPEAKER NOTES**

**DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES, MR. THABANG MAKWETLA (MP)**

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF CRADOCK CORRECTIONAL CENTRE SCHOOL**

**22 FEBRUARY 2019**

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* **Programme Director**
* **Distinguished Guests and Partners**
* **Correctional Managers and Officials**
* **Ladies and Gentlemen**

One of the tenets of our democracy has been an emphasis on education. The 1955 Freedom Charter declaration reads: “The doors of learning and culture shall be opened.” The sacrifices of the courageous youth of the 1976 uprising; brought us closer to realizing this dream and changed the nature of South Africa’s struggle for freedom and democracy. Young people have historically been drivers in the fight for equal education and equal access to opportunities for all. These sacrifices and the progress we have made as a country should serve as a stark reminder of our commitment to this aspect of human advancement and general governance.

The significance of today is that we are at a pivotal point where as a nation we are beginning to strike a balance between our historical aspirations, and forging ahead towards achieving our future goals. As the ANC led government, we value education as we believe that it promotes good citizenship, prepares our people for the needs of a democratic society and the modern economy.  This is even more important for the community behind bars. Research has proven that inmates who participate in educational programmes see the future differently as they develop a more positive outlook of life. Higher rates of education behind bars has been shown to result in lower rates of recidivism and violence. We therefore believe with conviction that education is and will remain a critical component of the rehabilitation measures of any correctional system.

The advanced policy framework and strategic thrusts in South Africa, including the recent move to provide free higher education, illustrates our government’s dedication to realising a country with equal opportunities for all. I am proud of the Department for successfully executing this project to construct a school building here at the Cradock Correctional Centre.

I am here with you because I want to discuss something very important with the youth that are with us here today - your future, your education and what is expected of you. You are here because you have made bad decisions in your life, you have made mistakes and committed crimes in your communities. I know that some of you are still adjusting to the environment, some of you may have been here for a while and are used to the environment, and some of you may be feeling very excited because you are almost at the end of your sentence.

Regardless of your current state or circumstances, you are here in this facility because you have been given a second chance in life. The chance you have been given comes with responsibility. You have teachers amongst you with the responsibility to inspire and push students to work harder and strive to learn; and some of you have families, parents and friends as your support system who are there to help you stay on track. You also have a government that is constantly working to provide support; and ensure that there are adequate education facilities and resources so everyone can receive the education they deserve. The hard truth is that we can provide state of the art facilities, the best resources, support system and teachers but none of it will matter unless you fulfill your responsibility. You are the one that must show up, commit to your education, follow the rules ensure that you do everything you can to succeed.

You are responsible for your own education and to make sure that you are the best version of yourself. Every single person in the world has something they are good at, every single one of you has something to offer. Education provides you with the opportunity to discover what it is that you love and what it is that you are good at. Perhaps you are a good public speaker or politician or maybe your idea will eradicate poverty in South Africa- you can discover that through the critical thinking skills offered by social sciences and debating. You may be a good writer, a creative thinker and an innovator and you discover this in your English class. Perhaps you have a passion to cure the ill in society and through Maths and Science you can discover the cure for HIV or diabetes and other diseases. No matter what your dream is, education is the key that unlocks the door to a brighter future.

It is true that you can be whatever you want- because only you are responsible for your destiny. I tend to hear ridiculous things like education is not important, not valuable, or some of the richest people in the world never went to school. But the hard truth is you probably won’t be one of those people; people who realize success without an education are not even a drop in the ocean. Education is not only important for you and your wellbeing, it is important for your loved ones, your family and your country. Young people are the leaders of our future, you are supposed to be the ones making key decisions that advance and protect our democracy that we fought so hard for. Knowledge gives you the power to change the world.

It is not easy being incarcerated, it is very difficult and can be very lonely. School and learning can be fun but can also be hard. As much as we try make the environment inside correctional centers to be as conducive to learning and studying as possible the nature of prisons make this difficult. It is easy to be tempted to make bad decisions and be swayed by peer pressure to participate in bad habits such as gangs, abusive behavior and other activities that hinder your progress towards rehabilitation.

We also all come from different circumstances: some of us lost our parents, our families don’t know what they will have for dinner tonight, child headed households, struggles of poverty, bad neighborhoods, abusive situations and so on. But at the end of day the circumstances of your life are not and can never be an excuse for making bad life decisions. Being here in prison should not determine where you end up you have to create a better future for yourself.

Correctional Centers are a place that aims to give you a second chance in life. That is why this center provides formal education, social work services, psychological services, skills development and health care services. We care about you, your wellbeing and want to see you be the best version of yourself.

The Department of Correctional Services will continue to do the best we can to ensure that as many inmates as possible are able to access education; to enable them to lead lives as productive and socially responsible members of their communities upon release. Just two percent shy of the 79,42% national average achieved in the 2018 academic year by matriculants: correctional services is, indeed, making an indelible mark in educating those deemed to have been disruptive.

Our results have been increasing over the years and I would like to congratulate the Cradock school which has constantly been producing 100% pass rate.

Since the introduction of formal education in correctional facilities in 2012; over 600 offenders have successfully completed their matric exams producing a number of distinctions in different subjects. Many of them didn’t stop there, but proceeded to higher education. As a result, many offenders have undergraduate degrees, even Masters Degrees and PhDs in different disciplines obtained behind bars. Many more offenders are also registered for Adult Education and Training (AET) and Further Education and Training (FET) programmes. Surely, this will address the absence of technical skills, and competencies, required in the South African job market.

Through these opportunities, we call upon offenders to refocus and to channel their energies in educating themselves for a better future. I want to challenge all of you to rethink, work hard and map out your own destiny. Education is not about a classroom and a book. All role players need to join hands to ensure that what we have achieved thus far is improved, and make it possible for all our 14 DCS schools to thrive.

I would like to acknowledge the strides that the Department of Education is making to ensure that learners across the country receive access to quality education. I would also like to thank the DBE for providing support to the Department of Correctional Services to ensure that our offenders have a better chance at life. We need to do far more to ensure that we improve the quality of teaching through strengthening the curriculum and skills of our educators particularly in their methodology and content knowledge. Education must be our centre of convergence and something that binds all of us for the good of the nation and humanity. Correctional Services schools must be the fountain of knowledge and intellectual capacity. We must sustain the gains we have achieved and get more than half of the 162 000 inmates into formal education.

Vision 2030 or the National Development Plan (NDP), has a special focus on the youth and it states:

 “Having a relatively young population can be advantageous; provided the majority of working-age individuals are gainfully employed…The challenge is to convert this into a demographic dividend. This will only be possible if the number of working-age individuals can be employed in productive activities.”

About 65% of offenders in the care of Correctional Services are young people. This is unacceptable, especially in a country where many young people lost their lives fighting for liberation and a fair education system. Young people need to make better decisions. You must always remember that the freedom we enjoy today was not received on a silver platter, but through blood, sweat and tears.

South Africa is cognisant of the work that must still be done to ensure that young citizens are able to contribute meaningfully to the nation; while being able to access opportunities that freedom and democracy have brought to the fore. All stakeholders in the country, including communities, government and all sectors have a role to play in creating the conditions for young people to become active, equipped citizens who can participate meaningfully in our country’s growth and development.

Good quality education and skills development, including moral education, will be key to this. If youth can be motivated and educated the right way, they surely can spearhead the progress of a nation and make the world a better place to live.

We are doing everything we can to make sure that you have everything you need. This new school is an attestation to this and our commitment to ensure that young people are at the forefront of our fight for economic transformation and emancipation, and not be languishing behind bars. It is young people who must lead the fight against crime, and be builders of dynamic communities free from criminality and all types of abuse, especially abuse against women, children and those who are differently abled.

THANK YOU