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**SPEECH AND PRIZE GIVING DAY
AT
MASIBUMBANE HIGH SCHOOL**

**ADDRESS BY
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MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS AND
PRESIDENT OF THE INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY**

MASIBUMBANE HIGH SCHOOL: AUGUST 28, 1999

The Principal of Masibumbane High School, Mr S.A. Shandu; the Honourable Minister of Education and Culture, Mrs EEN kaNkosi-Shandu; Deputy Principal Mrs T.P. Nxumalo; District Manager and Regional Chief Director; Rev. Thungo who represents parents; other members of staff, parents, distinguished guests and learners.

It is a great privilege for me to come here to be presented to you by none other than the Minister of Education and Culture, Mrs kaNkosi-Shandu. I say this for various reasons. First of all, the Minister was herself once a teacher at this High School, shortly after it was founded and before she left to found Ekudubekeni High School. Both these schools are places where the Minister left her footmarks. These two High Schools are amongst the schools that have good results for its Standard 10 learners. The Minister is also a distinguished resident of the community of Ulundi. Apart from her position as Minister, she is also the National Chairperson of the Women's Brigade of Inkatha Freedom Party. She was previously a colleague of mine in the national government as Deputy Minister of the Department of Public Works in Pretoria, before she was called upon to take over the Ministry of Education and Culture in the Province of KwaZulu Natal. It is a



privilege to work with Minister kaNkosi-Shandu. She is not a leader who tells others to work hard but she leads by example by herself working harder than anyone else.

The KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture is the largest education department of any other Province as KwaZulu Natal has the highest population of any other Province in South Africa. The only other Department which is larger than it, is the Department of Defence. You will understand then why it is to me such an honour to be introduced by such a distinguished daughter of our Nation. I thank her for having agreed to come here to perform the task that she has just performed. She is certainly a role model in her own right!

It is a pleasure for me to share in the occasion of this year's Prize Giving and Speech Day at Masibumbane High School. I wish to thank all those who have played a role in organising today's event, as well as those who, by their attendance, are giving a contribution towards making this an occasion of special joy and significance. I know that it means a great deal in the life of a child when one's parents enter into the everyday world of teachers and schoolbooks, and participate in the events which mark the passage of growth from childhood to adult life.

I am a father myself and I know that among the many earthly gifts we can give our children, none is greater than that of attention. Attention is indeed a double blessing, for the joy of our children becomes a joy of our own. I am pleased that the parents of learners attending Masibumbane High School have joined today in celebrating the labours of their children, as they strive for academic excellence and personal growth. We cannot forget, however, those who are there each day

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encouraging our children, helping them, teaching them, guiding them and listening to them. I therefore applaud the teachers of Masibumbane High School and welcome your presence here today.

Within this atmosphere of excitement and consequence, I wish also to thank those who are providing today's entertainment. Since I was a young boy singing in our school choirs, I have loved music. It is therefore a tremendous pleasure for me to listen to the charming and talented voices and instruments performing here today. Likewise, the dancing has been performed beautifully and I wholeheartedly commend your efforts. It is good to see young people tackling anything, be it creative, sporting or academic, with such enthusiasm and spirit.

I wish to speak today on this very subject, for I believe that it is only with enthusiastic efforts that we may achieve excellence in any area of our lives. I have dedicated my life to the pursuit of excellence. Last year, I was honoured to receive the 1998 Award of the South African Foundation for Excellence and Achievement. On that occasion, I expressed the need for a culture of excellence to be built into our education system so that through our children, we can plant the seeds of excellence of an entire nation. I believe that the achievements of a few can inspire and prompt the growth of many, and I am dedicated to creating a society in which individual industry and ingenuity might be recognised and rewarded.

It is for this reason that I support and encourage occasions such as this which offer recognition for the hard work and personal efforts of young learners. I wish to congratulate each of you who have received a prize today. Know that this prize is more than just a piece of paper. I want to stress that true reward for your efforts will come in the everyday moments of your life, as you are able to think



more clearly, understand more easily and work with greater skill. Everything that you are learning during your sojourn at Masibumbane High School will favourably influence the rest of your lives. I encourage you to take in all that you can and learn from every lesson, so that you may secure for yourselves the maximum fulfilment of your life's potential.

There is very little in life that is easily achieved or effortlessly done. We must work for what we want and always give in order to receive. You are fortunate though, for you have the privilege of a sound education and the opportunity to learn about your world as much as you are willing to know. I believe that the education you receive from Masibumbane High School will teach you more than facts and figures. I believe that you are learning also the discipline of hard work and commitment, both of which must be employed in order to achieve excellence. Excellence is no less than your very best, and personal limits ought never to be dictated by personal circumstance.

History has given us countless examples of men and women who rose above their accidents of birth to achieve what others could only dream of. You have an example right here in the person of Minister kaNkosi-Shandu. Poverty, physical disability and lack of support have all been overcome, and excellence has been achieved in the face of great difficulty. John Milton, a famous English poet, became blind while writing Paradise Lost, yet he persevered to complete his work which today is one of the most well-known works of English literature. Beethoven knew he would never hear his final symphony, for his hearing was rapidly deteriorating, yet he composed his majestic choral masterpiece regardless. Helen Keller, whom I met as a young man, suffered a debilitating disease as a young child which left her blind, deaf and dumb. Still she went on to become the champion

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of the poor and the sick, uplifting countless people with her selfless giving.

History abounds with examples like these. Our own Premier, Mr Lionel Percival Hercules Mbeki Mtshali, began life as a herd boy and lost both his parents and his land during the vicious years of apartheid. Yet he persevered and worked and pushed forward with never-ceasing determination to reach the position in which he finds himself today. Why did these people persevere? Why did they not throw up their hands in despair and blame circumstance, illness, poverty and oppression? I believe that in every heart lies the potential for greatness, but the responsibility to realise our potential rests solely upon ourselves.

Education is one of the best spheres where the principle of giving and receiving is so clearly demonstrated. Our teachers do the giving and you do the receiving. They do not coerce you to receive. Those who want to receive amongst you receive, in the sense of the old saying that you can take a horse to a river, but you cannot make him drink. The results at the end of the year will tell not only your parents but the whole world who amongst you has been willing to drink from this fountain of knowledge which is Masibumbane High School.

Because of the past, racism and apartheid have left the black community as the most economically deprived. It is amongst we blacks that you find the poorest of the poor. Poverty is still the biggest problem facing our people, and it is not something new. It has been with us for several generations. And yet black parents have sacrificed to give you the opportunities which many of our black children do not even dream of ever having. African parents have always strived to ensure that their children get better education than they themselves received. Many of my generation had semi-literate and illiterate parents who did all in their

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power to ensure that we had the opportunities which they themselves never had.

I remember my own childhood at Usuthu Primary School at the Royal Palace of KwaDlamahlahla in Nongoma where I grew up. The school was later known as Mpumalanga School. One of the widows of King Solomon ka Dinuzulu, my maternal uncle, who had died before we went to school, by the name of Ndlunkulu Grace (or uMavilakazi) used to buy yards of material and use her sewing machine to make school shirts for us. To begin with we wore these without any pants and with nothing under the long shirt! Incidentally, she is the only Queen of King Solomon who is still alive today. She looked after me and my cousin, Prince Matthew ka Solomon, her own son. Later she would sew shirts and pants for us using khaki material from the local shop. I remember the first pair of shoes which were second-hand ones which she bought from the local shop. These we wore on Sundays when we went to Church. We attended school bare-footed until I passed Form I. It was only when we were taken to Adams College by the Regent, Prince Mshiyeni ka Dinuzulu with two of my other cousins, Prince Thandayiphi ka Solomon and Prince Penuel ka Solomon, that the Prince stopped at Woolfsons in Durban to buy us shoes and long pants. We still wore khaki shorts during the week and wore our long pants only on Sundays and when there were functions at our College.

That is the background from which I come. The food we ate as boarders at Adams College was something you today would probably not accept. There was porridge in the morning and a slice of bread. And some coloured water for tea which we called Umtanya. We had a couple of slices of bread and a kind of thick soup for lunch which we called Umdaki and on Sundays we had one or two pieces of meat. I remember that only one strike took place when I was doing Standard 10. In many



ways you can see that you are more fortunate than we were at about your age. But we pushed on and did not complain as often as learners complain today.

On the other hand, I must state that we did not have as many diversions that distracted our minds from our studies, except of course the old problem of girl-boy relationships which some took up more prematurely than others. We realise that today even this for you has dangers which never existed during our times. I am thinking here of the HIV/AIDS virus which is such a scourge today which is wiping off our young people, with funerals being held at the end of almost every week. You are also facing the temptation of drugs and all sorts of substances and liquor which have ruined many promising careers. The worse "vice" that existed during our times was smoking which was prohibited. That was even long before it was known that tobacco is carcinogenous.

I know that those of you who have achieved excellence have done so because you were able to overcome these temptations. We do congratulate you. We rejoice with you and your parents. We congratulate you as much as we congratulate your parents for your achievements. And we congratulate your parents for their sacrifices. Remember there are no jobs for your parents today. We realise that in a way our congratulations may be premature because you still have to face the end of the year exams.

To digress a bit, we were fortunate in that colleges such as Adams College where I received my High School education, and Inanda Seminary, where Minister kaNkosi-Shandu received her High School education, were missionary institutions. They were Christian institutions, so we learnt at that stage that the "fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." There was something that I found very amusing. At

Adams College there was a chapel where we could go for prayers in the evenings. It was amusing because during the year few students went to pray in the chapel in the evenings, but a few weeks before exams, the chapel would be chock-a-block full of students! Those of us who went there more regularly never forgot that going into the chapel every evening by itself would not give us a pass because "God helps those who help themselves."

It is important that we seek within ourselves the driving force which causes us to pursue excellence. I urge the learners of Masibumbane High School to take pride in your work and in your achievements. As you grow and mature, it is vital to discover a sense of self-respect which does not accept that you should give less than your best or offer half-hearted efforts. I can assure you that you are responsible for your own successes or failures in life. It is up to each one of you to grasp the opportunities offered and make the most of every challenge by meeting it with enthusiasm, hard work, determination and commitment to achieving excellence.

There is certainly no lack of opportunities. I believe that the challenges facing our youth in the present day are no longer those of having too few options to choose from, but rather the difficulty of discerning which option among a vast sea of opportunities is the right one to follow. With the rapid advance of technological development and the increasing accessibility of information, many new paths are opening to young people. However, it is important to recognise that not every opportunity is worthwhile and not every road ought to be walked down. In assessing possible life opportunities, one can always use the yardstick of ease. If something seems just too easy, most likely, it is certainly not. Remember, anything worthwhile does not come easily.



I know that this is a lesson which every learner at Masibumbane is learning with diligence. Those of you who received prizes here today will be able to testify that it was not a lack of effort or easy sailing which secured your prize. Rather, it was a personal commitment to achieving excellence, to doing all that you can do and striving to do more than the minimum requirement. This is so important that I dare not fail to emphasise it enough. If we accept mediocrity in our own lives, we will accept mediocrity in the lives of others, and our society will become incapable of rising above the artificial limitations set upon us by the circumstance of history.

Our country struggles under the continuing difficulties created by a past of prejudice, ignorance, oppression and lack of opportunities. For many years, we lacked the opportunities to grow as human beings, for many of us were not afforded the benefit of education, and information was withheld because it was thought to be dangerous to the status quo. Under these conditions, we fought and suffered, and we worked continually to create a better society in a country which made room for every person to pursue individual achievement and personal growth. South Africa has now emerged into this time of democratic freedom, and it is entrenched within our Constitution that every individual has the right to pursue personal happiness.

I believe that personal happiness cannot be found unless one is willing to discover the will to live. To me, living does not mean the daily drudge of eating, sleeping and going to school. To really live involves welcoming the joys of experience and giving abundantly of oneself in order to receive in kind. As you pursue excellence in everything you do, so will you find that your heart begins to swell with enthusiasm and you will be recognised as someone who really knows how to live. We must embrace life in this way, for everything else is just inferior.