

ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, MR CHUPU MATHABATHA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE GALA DINNER ORGANISED BY THE SOUTH
AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, HELD AT BOLIVIA LODGE,
POLOKWANE.

25 April 2019

Masters of ceremonies;
Our Provincial Chairperson, Dr Sizeka Maweya;
The leadership of SAMA in its entirety;
Our MEC for Health, Cde Dr Phophi Ramathuba;
Leadership of COSATU;
Our Director General, Ntate Nape Nchabeleng;
Acting HOD for the Department of Health, Mme
Professor Mahlo Mokgalong;
Representatives from event sponsors, ABSA and Abacon Blue Star;
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

Good evening!

Let me start by expressing my appreciation to the leadership of the South African Medical Association for this generous invitation. I feel truly honoured to be part of this history defining Gala Dinner.

I am advised that this is an inaugural Gala Dinner which is expected to be a midwife of many more Annual Gala Dinners to follow. I am deliberately speaking of many more Gala Dinners to follow because I am confident about the future of SAMA as an organisation.

I am certain that SAMA will live for these many more years to come because it is an organisation with purpose and a clear vision. From your inception, you have defined your vision as that of striving for the unity of doctors in the interest of the health of our nation.

Your vision is very broad –it is not merely about the narrow interests of members of SAMA; your broad vision is about the health of this nation.

That is a vision we support as government. It is for this reason that we are always happy to associate with the activities of your organisation.

I can also speak with confidence to say that as SAMA you are a true parliament of South African doctors. I am saying this because there is no any other organisation of doctors which comes any closer to your organisation with regard to membership.

The last time we interacted with your records, you were a proud home of over 70% of doctors in this country. That's how big and powerful you are as an organisation.

Obviously; what makes SAMA be such an attractive organisation for doctors are the values and principles that makes the DNA of the South African Medical Association.

You would agree with me that one of the most visible birthmarks of SAMA is its progressive outlook. It is not by accident that as SAMA you are part of the broader Mass Democratic Movement through your affiliation to COSATU. As you would know, COSATU remain the biggest, most militant yet highly disciplined worker-controlled federation.

From its inception, COSATU has identified itself with the progressive forces that are about fundamental change in the society.

In particular, COSATU stands for:

The improvement of the material conditions of the working people as a whole,
and

To ensure that workers participation in the struggle for peace and democracy
Principles

At a more specific level, you would agree with me that what has sustained your organisation for all these years are the principles of innovative and quality leadership, organisational vibrancy, embracing the spirit of ubuntu and above all, professionalism at all times.

These are the principles and values you must continue to expose if you want this inaugural Gala Dinner to be the first of 100 more to come.

At a tactical level, like any organisation, your primary task is servicing your membership –but, your strategic mandate is that of working for the overall health of the nation. This is a mission you cannot afford to betray.

Comrades;

This Dinner and Award ceremony takes place under the theme that seeks to locate the role of medical practitioners in the transformation of the health system towards a quality healthcare.

I think the leadership should be applauded for crafting such an imposing theme. The theme itself has already located you in the trenches in the struggle for the transformation of the healthcare system in the country, and our province in particular.

You would know that this transformation does not take place in a vacuum or outside of contesting forces.

Transformation itself as a phenomenon is a process of struggle. The reason why a struggle is called a struggle is because of the inherent contradiction which you would find in every struggle.

For an example, the struggle for good health is always waged against the ever-present realities of infirmity, diseases and disabilities.

This is the case with any process of struggle –you would know that the struggle to liquidate the apartheid system was waged against a vicious regime which sought to maintain was the status quo -, which was about the preservation of White privilege.

The same thing is happening with the struggle for the transformation of the health system. Whilst so many of our people are supportive and cannot wait for a transformed public healthcare system, there are those who are pulling to a different direction.

I can tell you now, that the struggle to transform the healthcare system will be as intense as the struggle to liquidate apartheid was.

What we should never down play is the fact that there are so many vested interests in this regard.

The truth is that the current un-accommodative and expensive healthcare systems work well for other people. There are those whose bread is buttered by the inequalities of the current system. They thrive on the suffering of our people. These are the people or the forces that will stand in opposition to any agenda that seeks to alter the status quo.

They will oppose everything, including the envisaged National Health Insurance. Instead of contributing ideas as to how we can make the NHI work better, they will overload us with a mountain of reasons why the initiative cannot work. We must therefore be vigilant against such forces and against such tendencies. Comrades - our battle cry has always been about developing a national health system which would offer affordable health care.

You would know that through the RDP document, the ANC and its alliance partners, committed to focus more on primary health care to prevent disease and promote good health.

In particular, we said that we will build a national health system which would achieve some of the following priorities:

- give free medical care to children under 6 years;
- improve maternity care for women;

provide free services to disabled people, aged people and unemployed people; initiate programmes to prevent and treat major diseases like TB and AIDS give women the right to choose whether to have an early termination of pregnancy improve and expand mental health care, and run special education programmes on health, aimed particularly at young people

I think I can say it with full confidence that with regard to some of these items I have mentioned, we are doing exceptionally well as a nation. This progress is owed to our doctors, majority of who are members of SAMA. As Doctors, you are the driving engine of our healthcare system.

It is for this reason that a partnership between organisations such as SAMA and the government is always a winning partnership. Without this partnership, there can be no healthcare system to talk about.

Programme Director;

I am equally advised that tonight is also about conferring of awards to some deserving medical practitioners whose work continue to make us proud. I am happy and excited to be part of this important award ceremony.

I am advised that part of the ward categories will include the Continued Professional Development. You would agree with me that there is no need to over emphasise the significance of this category.

We all know that the real challenge for all living creatures is continuous development. It is befitting that we must always make time to recognise those who do research in an effort to interact with latest trends in the field. This is what true development is about.

I am also particularly happy that these awards will also recognise those who have served the public service with loyalty and distinction for a period of over 10 years. This is a very important award category.

I am saying this because we all know of the challenges in the public sector. It is not always easy to attract talent and skill to the public sector. Where we succeed to attract, the next struggle is to sustain such a talent.

I can therefore say without any fear of contradiction that this category recognises those who are in the sector for service and not glitter and glamour. We salute you and we hope to sustain for 10 more other years and beyond.

The other significant category is that of those doctors who work in other province yet make efforts to come and perform some work in our Province for zero fees.

These are the selfless cadres in this struggle to build a healthy nation. We salute you for your selflessness and boundless generosity. We know that your efforts will not be televised, but we see you.

I am also told that other category to be recognised will be the category of medical pioneers.

Without saying a lot about this category, I only want to say that I am very happy with what I have been reading in the newspapers in the last few days. I think we can keep it up and make Limpopo a true pioneer in the medical space.

Limpopo is the future, and what you have done in the past few days, says we are there and South Africa and Africa must watch the space.

Programme Directors;

I want to conclude by once again thanking you for your audience. More importantly, I want to thank and salute the leadership of SAMA In the province for a wonderful partnership with government.

I know that there are challenges in the sector which require our collective attention; however, I am convinced that no challenge is above our collective abilities to resolve.

Let us continue to work together for the good health of our nation.

I thank you.