

**SPEECH BY LIMPOPO MEC FOR EDUCATION ISHMAEL KGETJEPE AT THE
LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL EDUCATION SUMMIT, 29 MAY 2017, HAYANA LODGE,
LIMPOPO**

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Principals of schools

Parents

Learner formations and representatives

Members of the media

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme director, it is a pleasure to participate in the opening of this Education Summit. It is equally a great honour to be meeting our stakeholders a year later following our 2016 summit. We met on the 09th of May last year and today is the 29th of May and I would like to take this opportunity to appreciate your participation in this important forum that looks at what we need to do to deliver education that ensures our future national prosperity. Allow me to also appreciate and thank the SG of the Department and her team of officials for putting together this summit. We commend you for convening our stakeholders from around the province to help chart the course towards the delivery of quality education in the province. I must indicate from the outset that we are committed to working with each one of you towards the realization of our mandate and objectives. It is therefore encouraging to witness this unprecedented momentum for the summit, just like we saw last year.

As you know May is a month in which we celebrate Africa Day and as a province we did so at the University of Venda as part of the annual commemoration of the 1963 founding of Organization of African Unity (OAU) presently the AU. Our schools province-wide are encouraged to learn and sing the African Union Anthem in order to instill pride and patriotism in our children to their African heritage regardless of race, ethnicity and religion. A gathering like this resonates well with some words that are in the African Union Anthem which says: **“Let us all unite and toil together to give the best we have to Africa”**.

We have come here united in purpose of toiling together to give our children the best we have, to help our children get access to a better education, to ensure that doors of learning are never shut

and to ensure that we have the best schools that are functional and effective when dispensing teaching and learning. We look up to this summit to help us strengthen efforts towards our collective goal of delivering education of the highest standards, effectively and efficiently. It will also strengthen our on-going efforts to turn around the fortunes of the Department in its quest to render best teaching and learning in our schools. For us to arrive at such a level, let us spend time deliberating, exchanging ideas, sharing experiences and best practices, as well as formulate proposals to address challenges facing education.

In last year 'summit, we have benefited immensely from the presentations, exchanges and discussions, providing us with rare insight on how best to build our processes towards the kinds that are effective and efficient. With great honour and humility, we accepted the inputs and that is why are here to ascertain how much we have done to improve our systems so that we deliver as expected. Our theme for the summit captures our resolve to consolidate our collaborations with all stakeholders, with a sense of togetherness and common identity, ready and able to take our rightful place in the global community of nations.

The global education agenda is part of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that make up the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. SDG 4 calls for an inclusive, quality and equitable education and lifelong opportunities. Besides the global scenario, our local context as captured in the National Development Plan (NDP), Vision 2030 indicates that: **“South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes. The performance**

of South African learners in international standardized tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access”. Our 21 year old Constitution, on the other hand, declares education as a basic human right for all and we also have our national basic education sector plan – the Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realization of Schooling 2030 pointing a clear direction to improve access, redress, efficiency, inclusivity and quality of learning outcomes.

I am drawing your attention to all these important documents to illustrate how education is viewed internationally, in the continent and here at home. There is an understanding across the board that access to education must increase and prioritized. There has to be an improved quality of teaching and learning, improved accountability systems to ensure that quality outcomes are achieved. We are saying let us toil together and cooperate as public representatives, officials, partners, business, organized labour and other stakeholders.

We must all have a tangible understanding that undeniably, the primary role of education in many ways, from a child’s earliest years to their completion in higher education and training is to prepare our young people for the jobs of the future and to ensure that they are in a position to excel once they enter the workplace and the rest of their lives. We will rely upon some of these young people to be innovators and entrepreneurs of the future. We must skill them in such a way that the education we provide, does not just skill them to get a job but provide them with skills to create jobs for others.

We are delighted that this gathering is a statement that tells us as sector that you agree that education is of fundamental importance to all children of Limpopo. Your presence is a statement of belief that the issues to be reviewed and discussed today and tomorrow have such a fundamental significance for the future of our children and their communities. Otherwise you would not be here if you did not share that conviction and working together we can make education act as a significant lever to deliver greater social inclusion.

We are happy, our sister Department, Social Development held a summit last week on Early Childhood Development and we continue to collaborate with them to ensure that a solid foundation is laid in early childhood education, focusing on evidence-based measures designed to get maximum improvement in education outcomes. We acknowledge the importance of strengthening foundations in early childhood and school education. It is incumbent on us to ensure that the silos of our education system are coordinated and that we are all working towards similar objectives. Children who start school behind their peers find it very hard to catch up and reach that gap.

It is in this regard that, the work of education must begin at home, it should begin with parents, who are the first teachers of their children, continue in child care where applicable and every child must be supplemented by a pre-school or early learning program. A lot of work still needs to be done to have strong learning foundations in the early Grades to arrest dropping out of school towards the end of secondary schooling. The NDP in this aspect says: **“mediate the high drop-out rate of learners from the basic schooling system by increasing the learner retention**

rate to 90%, and allowing for an increase in the number of learners entering vocational and occupational pathways”.

Our priority must be to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to achieve improved quality outcomes in the early Grades. Learners in the Foundation Phase must be equipped with the skills needed to cope with all the curriculum requirements of the higher Grades. For us to achieve the overall quality, efficiency and inclusivity of the basic education, we must more on the foundation phase and the performance of the young ones. We must ensure at the outset that children are school ready, ensure that when a learner leaves primary school, they are equipped for success at secondary, prior to successfully partaking in further training or higher education.

It is in this regard, that we appreciate a programme such as the Targeting Talent run by Wits University, which embraces and harnesses the untapped talents of our Grade 10 to 12 learners focusing on Mathematics and Physical Science. Though this program, our learners from rural areas are given early exposure and experience to university so that they can easily cope when it is time to pursue their higher education studies. This also promotes science and mathematics experience for our talented young boys and girls in rural areas. We must indicate that our numbers in mathematics and physical sciences in terms of learner enrollment have been going up in the past two years. It is only with successful foundations built by parents, early childhood educators, primary and secondary teachers that can ensure that our children can face anything beyond basic education. We must collaborate effectively to ensure that these educational objectives are realized because they are absolute bedrocks of learning.

While we are recording improvements in other areas, I will refer here to the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2015, which show that of all the provinces in South Africa, Limpopo has recorded noteworthy improvement and growth in both Mathematics and Science for Grade 5 and 9 respectively since 2003. We also recorded an improvement of 1.8% in physical science and 8.4% in mathematics in our 2016 Grade 12 results.

This upward trajectory is encouraging but we are not afraid to also indicate where we have not done well or performed as expected. It is by now common knowledge that our class of 2016 Grade 12 results declined and we were not able to meet our target. Limpopo, however, continues to produce star learners, who achieve excellent results in different Ministerial categories. Of the 22 national top achieving learners, 12 of them came from our Province.

Results such as these are important indicators for all of us, as government, principals, teachers, business community and parents that we need to do more and to look at reasons why we are not seeing sufficient comparable improvements in learner outcomes. This must be done without pointing fingers to anyone or any direction. We know that we might not be blessed with the best infrastructure and the best technology but we do have excellent schools, hardworking teachers and principals in classrooms right through the province. We can do and indeed must do better and that is why teacher development has been taking a centre stage, providing our educators and others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed in curriculum delivery. We must be consistent in this intervention.

As we make all manner of interventions where we identify challenges, we would like to raise our concerns about the effects of service delivery protests that spill over to the disruptions of teaching and learning in our schools. We urge our communities not to use schools as bargaining chips no matter how aggrieved our communities are, more so that issues at hand more often than not are not related to education. Worse, is the destruction of property that goes with these protests while we still have massive infrastructure backlogs to address.

This is one area that we must look into at this summit so that we reach a point where communities can defend children's right to basic education. Education is not meant to be run on catch up programmes and whatever time is available outside the traditional teaching and learning, must be used enrich what has been covered by our educators. It is in this regard that all of us must have zero tolerance for any disruptive behavior in our schools. However legitimate the demands could be, you must never interrupt and interfere with the education of our children.

Our communities must take pride in having schools that are characterized by learners and teachers who are highly motivated, principals who are effective managers providing administrative and curriculum leadership, schools that are accountable to parents, committed and professional teachers who have knowledge of subjects they teach. Let me emphasize here, **Effective Leadership**, because it makes a difference in improving learning and promoting the learning of all children. It turns out that leadership in schools not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact on learning.

So, we expect nothing less than effective leadership in our schools, in our circuits and districts. We expect the setting of directions, charting a clear course that everyone understands, establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance. Talking of data, I am delighted that we will be launching officially today, at this very summit, the Data Driven Districts (DDD) programme as a monitoring tool for educator and learner attendance and learner performance.

It is critical that we must do enough in terms of the protection of contact time between teachers and learners. The amount of contact that learners have with their educators as part of their learning experience is very important and contributes immensely to learner performance.

The SG has articulated the purpose and no doubt, we need to work through all the issues, find good ideas to consider and to discuss further with stakeholders. The commissions are meant to facilitate debate and encourage ideas. Participation in the debate must appreciate where we find ourselves as a province and we must be willing to establish plans that can give us certainty, sustainability and excellence in basic education that we all want for the years ahead. We would be doing a disservice to our learners, schools and communities if we do not take this exercise seriously. We must position ourselves to meet challenges so that effective teaching and learning can occur across the province of Limpopo.

As I conclude, let me indicate that the challenges are real. Progress is possible. Resources are needed. This summit is an important step towards a better future and an educated world. I wish you well in this two day summit, I wish you well in those

discussions and deliberations. We do look forward to hearing hopefully some positive, applicable and tangible outcomes that will inform future government policy. The topics that must be discussed in commissions are by no means easy topics and will require critical engagement if we are to achieve lasting results from this summit. Let us discuss in an honest and robust manner so as to revitalize the sector and propel it to new heights.

As a sector we have to learn lessons out of everything and as we all know, we learn more lessons usually in life from mistakes than you do from successes because you focus on what went wrong around the mistakes. We need to keep, across the board, a sense of perspective about what might be going wrong. There might be one or two things that went wrong in the background with big consequences in terms of where we are right now. But whatever it is, it should not deter us from doing other things that have positive benefits for our education now and in the future.

Today and tomorrow, we must allow those who can see us clearly, those who have an aerial view of our department, enough time to speak so that we make the necessary amends that will strengthen our Department as we move forward.

Together we move South Africa forward!

I thank you!