

**Closing remarks by Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Blade Nzimande
at Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation**

Calling this conference was a huge risk for us. We didn't know how the sector would respond as the issues on the agenda are controversial and go to the very heart of the SA university system. Many stakeholders see these issues very differently and there was always a potential for conflict. There are also many vested interests in the current system which this conference sought to examine.

The risk we took was to bring people with widely divergent views together in the hope that they would see that they have common interests and would therefore seek a way forward.

This model of deliberative democracy which Michael Burawoy referred to is a model which was developed in the last years of apartheid and early years of democracy in SA. When we institutionalized many of our gains from 1994, we did not adequately pay attention to the necessity for human agency to sustain those gains through continuous and open engagement. We are now trying to reclaim our democratic traditions under new conditions

Ladies and gentlemen, and comrades, transformation is a continuing and long term process. Over the past two days, we have laid the basis for this continuing process.

Some of the achievements of this summit include:

- Laying a foundation for better communication which hopefully would impact on the institutions.
- Agreement on a stakeholder council
- Whatever reservations there may have been, this summit has accepted the main findings of the Soudien Report. The challenge remains for us to continue to confront discrimination in all its forms which Prof Barney Pitso Rabe referred to as "the brutal violence of the mind"
- We have all committed ourselves to only just a charter but to do something about learning and teaching – as well as placing students at the centre.
- We have taken the debate on differentiation further. It's clear that the funding model we must review must be based on a particular model of differentiation. On this matter we must bite the bullet – and soon. Differentiation is not just an instrument outside of transformation. In itself it is a terrain for transformation. It must also be driven by transformation imperatives premised on what some have called the levelling of the playing fields on two levels: (a) institutionally by addressing particularly the situation of formerly black universities; and (b) transforming what Crain Soudien calls the sociology of higher education spaces which implies creating inclusive and caring universities.
- Although universities must be differentiated, it has been stressed here that they must also be part of a national system serving national needs, characterized by co-operation, networking and internal articulation within the system.

- We are pleased that there seems to be also agreement about the need to relook the negative effects of commercialization, as well as agreement on some kind of leadership training for students. This must be broadened beyond students to higher education leadership training at all levels.

Way forward:

Firstly, we welcome the fact that there has been agreement on a stakeholder council. One recommendation of the Soudien report that we certainly accepted was the establishment of a ministerial oversight committee which must interface with institutional self monitoring systems.

The Department will study in detail all the material that has come out of this summit and we urge you to do so as well. All the information from the deliberations, including all the inputs, will be accessible via the CEPD and Department websites.

We urge you to go and report back to your constituencies and institutions. The debates of this summit must not end here but must continue in your own structures and at institutional level.

There have been many proposals. We take seriously the urgency for revitalisation and renewal of the academic profession. We will therefore consider establishing a dedicated team to look at this.

What we have agreed upon in this summit is not just for government but for all of us. On our part, we will play our role but we expect all other stakeholders to do the same.

I would like to extend a word of appreciation particularly to the student reps who had a national conference to prepare for this summit. Among their many useful contributions, I was pleased that the students identified that their leadership structures may be too preoccupied with governance and not academic issues.

Finally,

I would like to thank the following people who contributed to the success of this summit:

- The VC and staff of CPUT who hosted us and worked so hard to accommodate and cater for the conference
- Members of the steering committee led by my advisor John Pampallis
- Martin Prew and his team at the CEPD
- Students at CPUT journalism department who produced special editions of Edu Vision
- The M&G and UCT in partnering us pre-summit symposium
- All those who made presentations, chaired sessions, took notes, rapporteured and all those who attended and participated
- DG Mary Metcalfe, Acting DDG Kirti Menon and her team
- My team in the Ministry