

**Remarks by the Premier of Mpumalanga, Thabang Makwetla, at the hand-over of school uniforms to the Mathakge Combined School learners
Thursday 22 April 2005, Masoing Village**

Programme Director, MEC Siphosezwe Masango
His Worship the Mayor of Greater Groblersdal Municipality
Mr. Lionel Seloane
First National Bank CEO Mr Zweli Manyathi
And your colleagues from FNB
The Principal, staff and learners of Mathakge Combined School
Officials from the Department of Education
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of government, allow me to express our heartfelt appreciation of the generous gesture from First National Bank. You have made us proud because you have taken it upon yourself to give so kindly of your time and money.

Because of the hard work and generous support of people like you, Mpumalanga has made incredible progress in so many areas. You surely are a bank we can bank on. In you we have a reliable partner that continues to heed our call to make education everybody's business.

Yours is an example worth emulating because it represents the true spirit of social consciousness. Like true patriots and agents for change you could not afford to stand on the sideline and watch young people being denied an opportunity to be educated because they have no uniform or other learner support material.

Ladies and gentlemen, a little over two months we stood before the people of this province to unveil our plans for the year ahead. It was on that occasion that we said 2005 ought to be a year where all our efforts are geared towards opportunities for decent work and sustainable development in a vibrant people-centred province.

We promised to transform the province into one that is no longer an example of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. We said we would spare no effort in working towards a province where high levels of education and health are attained.

In short our vision was, and still is, to make Mpumalanga an even better place in which to live. Central to this new vision is the continued transformation of Mpumalanga into an integrated, region, politically, socially and economically.

This is a vision built on the noble task we set ourselves a decade ago. You will remember that at the time we promised to create a society where all the people of this province and country - regardless of race, colour, gender, class and age - would enjoy equal freedom, opportunities and prosperity.

We also set ourselves the task of transforming our society into one that guarantees freedom from poverty, freedom to explore our capabilities and freedom that will grant our children choices that our parents did not enjoy.

Because we realised that government alone would not be able to deal with the problems of our people, we appealed to everyone to lend a helping hand as we address these challenges. We made that call because we realised that the tasks that lie ahead of us as we advance towards a new Mpumalanga can only be accomplished if we continue to work in partnership with all our people.

We called on all partners to come to the party and sign the "people's contract" and commit themselves to honour the pact. We called on business and other economic stakeholders to declare for all to know what it is they would do to contribute to faster economic growth, job creation, skills development, poverty alleviation and building sustainable communities.

We said employers, organs of civil society, religious bodies, the workers, women, the youth, professionals – in fact everyone – should say what they will do to contribute towards a better Mpumalanga.

There are encouraging signs that our call had not fallen on deaf ears. Stakeholders have expressed support for our vision and programme. At the Badplaas Summit they told us they would work with us in making Mpumalanga a better place to live in.

They told us they would help us in ensuring that, amongst others, all children have decent classrooms. They would help us to further reduce the teacher/pupil ratio, improve spending in favour of children and students from poor households, and expand the school nutrition programme.

Programme Director, our experience over the past ten years has confirmed the importance of the active involvement of stakeholders in the process to bring about change. Ours has always been a people-centred government, which involves the people in all its work.

That is why in the first decade of democratic government we were able to achieve a lot. We have, in these ten years, brought water and electricity to millions of households and we have built houses and improved social and health security. We have also opened up access to quality education and removed discrimination in access to professions.

In the past decade all of us who embraced change and democracy, have walked together, one step at a time, on our journey towards growth, towards learning, towards reconstruction, towards solidarity, towards reconciliation, towards prosperity, towards development, towards freedom.

We have stayed together on this journey because we share that vision of transforming Mpumalanga into a humane and people-centred province.

We have stayed together because we wanted to lift our people from the depths of human suffering, deprivation, hunger, illiteracy, homelessness, harassment and death.

The past decade has been ten years of improving the lives of our people. It has been ten years of growing unity in action; ten years of peace and stability and ten years of expanding opportunities to build a better life for all.

And indeed we are on course in creating a better life for all. We have as South Africans made progress in building a caring society; and a caring society we have to become, by working together to turn our ideals into practical reality. This we can and shall do, as a united nation, bound together in a People's Contract to Create Work and Fight Poverty.

In conclusion, let me repeat an appeal I made at a function in Nelspruit this week. On Tuesday I spoke to a number of learners and teachers who had gathered to take delivery of bicycles sponsored by a benevolent businessperson. I appealed to the teachers and government officials to ensure that government money earmarked for the development of the child must be used for that purpose.

Stealing from the poor is bad. We all must say no to acts of immorality such as corruption, disregard for human life, abuse of women, children and the elderly. Indeed it is our primary task to banish poverty, under-development and hunger permanently from our province and country.

We must remain true to the overall objectives of our liberation struggle, a struggle all of us contributed immensely to. We all worked hard to usher in a democratic society that is people-centred.

We must not allow any wastage and leakages that would result in that child who is eager to learn being denied that chance because the money meant for text books has been stolen.

We must actively embrace the good, the positive, and inculcate it in our children and their offspring, respect for government property because indeed it is the property of the people.

As a people we MUST and CAN create a climate in our communities, our province and our country hostile to crime, including crimes of corrupt practice within both the public and private sectors. It is not in our communities where we sustain our marriages, raise our families, hang out with our friends, meet our neighbors, educate our children, worship our God.

Let me once again thank First National Bank and say to them: your generosity is truly amazing, and appreciated.

Today's event is very important in our quest to forge working partnerships between government and the private sector and should serve as a catalyst to mobilise and inspire public/private participation and help make our aim of a people's contract a reality.

I thank you.