

## **Address By The Head Of Department At The Launch Of The Provincial Liquor Conference**

**Polokwane, 04 April 2008**

Programme director  
Ladies and gentlemen  
Our beloved youth  
Friends and family  
Welcome,

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is, somewhere in the vocabulary of township existence, a school joke about a class teacher and his learners during mathematics class relating to additions and subtractions which may be instructive of the reasons why we are gathered here today. The teacher asked his charges what would they get if they deducted 2 beers from their fathers six bottles of beer. The answer, coming from excited little Johnny, was that whoever took the bottles would be in serious trouble with his father for taking any of his beer!

Today, in the shifting sands of time, we mark a time-capsule for the swift removal of the stigma of alcohol from our communities. The launch today of the Limpopo Provincial Liquor Conference will be seen many years to follow as among the noble efforts of this government to restore pride and dignity in our societies and to establish a corps of socially responsible corporate and business citizens who count among their profits and margins, the healthy state of affairs of the communities that buy their products and support the economy of this country. Indeed throughout this journey, we have held hands with the industry and communities about how this process will serve the interests of everyone, and at the same time ensure sustainable livelihoods for legal retailers of such products.

Our theme for the conference, **Save Limpopo, Drink Responsibly**, is therefore aptly coined after this desire to place the consumption of liquor on a national agenda of change and redirection. There can be no doubt that while all the evils of society cannot be attributed to the excessive consumption and abuse of liquor, there are aspects of the manner of consumption that border on some of the very worst problems being experienced in communities that are reflective of alcohol abuse. In recent months, the youth of this country through the African National Congress Youth League have added their voice to the growing concern of the manner in which alcohol related crimes and irresponsible behaviour have come to characterise the liquor trade especially in black townships.

They declared that alcohol was 'often not used in a socially acceptable way' and moved that a policy be drafted to prevent substance abuse in black

communities as most drinking habits with race were given effect by state institutions under apartheid. In effect, under apartheid, state organs used alcohol not only to suppress anti-apartheid notions, but sought to naturalise Africans as heavy drinkers while at the same time, denying them access to rehabilitative care and treatment. In this way, not only was the moral fibre of our communities deliberately eroded, the excessive nature of the problem permeated every level of our communities and societies where even payment in the form of alcohol in the Western Cape, was allowed as fair exchange for labour rendered! And as “coloured” perversely meant “closer” to white than black, the apartheid state could extend limited rehabilitation services to those designated 'coloured'.

Under the current circumstances, and taking note of the need for social cohesion in our country, there can be no doubt that as South Africans, rich or poor, we cannot accept that situation to continue with all its attendant problems. Each year millions of rand are wasted on giving care to victims of road carnage as a result of alcohol related driving, the Genie Coefficient of the province is also adversely affected by the large numbers of people using their hard earned money on drinking sprees rather than supporting their families. It has even become commonplace for people to explain malicious and disrespectful behaviour among youth and drunk people as a result of their being drunk rather than as an absence of rational and responsible thinking!

Faced with such daunting possibilities, as government and the industry we have a joint responsibility to clean alcohol of the stigma associated with it. This means in practice taking responsibility for the messaging and social effects of alcohol and deriving a sustainable balance of the need to grow the economy against the backdrop of creating healthy communities and restoring the moral fibre of our society.

The law alone cannot be the answer to these challenges. What we desperately need, what society and the industry needs is to strike a healthy balance while at the same time presenting an opportunity to do business conscientiously, and not rampant illicit liquor dealing, created as a result of a social environment in which alcoholic excess, particularly after 1976, reached new proportions and generated new and dangerous meanings of socially acceptable drinking.

In conclusion and as a manner of extending the discourse, we are well aware that our youth will be tomorrows men and women, and therefore no time should be wasted on teaching them the facts about alcohol usage, about legal trading and environmental degradation today rather than tomorrow when the damage is done. We need to change the face of alcohol use to infuse new meanings into its use, and to change the look of alcohol packaging in advertisements as these will ultimately lure gullible minds into the false belief that to be drunk is “cool” and socially acceptable. This, ladies and gentlemen,

is our mission unaccomplished. I wish to thank every one of us gathered here for role they are and will play in this task and wish you an eventful and meaningful day.

Thank you...