

**Minister of Science and Technology, Mr. Mosibudi Mangena, at the Official Launch of the National Science Week 2006, Nelspruit**

11 May 2006

The Programme Director, Director-General of Science and Technology, Dr Philemon Mjwara

The honourable MEC for the Mpumalanga Education Department, Mr Siphosizwe Masango

Head of Mpumalanga Education Department, Mr Ray Tywakadi

The honourable Executive Mayor, Councilor Justice Nsibande

Rector of Lowveld Agricultural College, Dr M S Kgaphola

Representatives of the Corporate Sector

Government officials

Parents, educators, learners

Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here to mark the beginning of an important event in the calendar of the science system. During the week of 13 to 20 May 2006, we will be celebrating National Science Week 2006. This is the period during which as a nation, and in all our nine provinces, we celebrate science and its importance in our daily lives.

Although this event has been taking place for six years now, I find the National Science Week 2006 very unique. The 2006 occasion coincides with the relocation of my department to its new state-of-the-art office building. Our new home has brought about a significance development to the science precinct in Tshwane. The Department of Science and Technology is now an immediate neighbour to some of its important institutions, the National Research Foundation, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Innovation Hub, the Council for Geosciences, the National Zoological Gardens and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). We believe this development will facilitate the much needed interaction among the science institutions, and enhance the development of a knowledge axis for our National System of Innovation. It has brought us a step closer to the establishment of a one-stop science and technology destination in South Africa.

This National Science Week marks the second year of the implementation of the project's Five-Year Plan. The implementation of the plan has resulted, among others, in our conducting the activities of the National Science Week in multiple sites and through multiple activities in all the nine provinces. Positive results are beginning to emerge from the implementation of this plan. The 43 sites, managed through our agency, the South African Agency for the Advancement of Science and Technology (SAASTA), made it possible for the National Science Week 2005 to achieve an exponential increase in the number of participants. Last year 175 000 people participated as compared to 60 000 the previous year. It is important to note that these achievements were attained with the same budget that was used for the events in the previous two years.

The National Science Week 2006 also forms a part of the youth oriented activities commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the 1976 June 16 Student Uprising, in which young and innocent lives were lost in the struggle against an unjust and unfair education system.

It is, however, equally sad to acknowledge that thirty years on, our science system is still grappling with two main issues. Firstly, our national system of innovation still has a long way to go before it could reposition itself strategically to adequately address past racial and gender imbalances within the SET system.

Secondly, we still need to work a lot harder as a Department of Science and Technology to contribute meaningfully towards the national effort of maximising the participation of our youth in science, engineering and technology disciplines. Even though significant work is being done, we, however, still need to develop and implement broader frameworks in a number of areas to strengthen this area of our work. Part of our milestones in this area includes the launch, in 2004, of the Centres of Excellence Programme. This Programme does not only provide our young people with exciting postgraduate research opportunities, but in some cases, also offers internships to second and third year university students.

We are painfully aware of the enormous challenges encountered in trying to increase the participation of Black and female students in such programmes. It is against this background that we intend obtaining cabinet approval for a Youth into Science Strategy soon.

The dual aim of the Strategy is to promote science and technology literacy, and encourage more of our youth to pursue careers in science, engineering and technology. I am delighted that various corporate sector players have joined Government in maximising the participation of our youth in science, engineering and technology careers. A case in point is the recently launched new Graduate Programme for Females in Technology (GPFT) by Vodacom. I am told this programme will develop women's technical and engineering skills and business acumen so they can contribute effectively to the design, development and maintenance of the mobile telecommunication systems. Other corporate sector organisations can take a leaf out of Vodacom's book to the benefit of our young women in the country.

The launch of the National Science Week 2006 in Mpumalanga Province largely complements the key thrusts of this event. This province, through the Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops, has a proven research and development strength on all aspects of cultivating tropical and subtropical crops. This is one of the oldest institutes of the Agricultural Research Council, which is celebrating 80 years of research excellence this year. The Institute has built an enviable reputation as an internationally recognised centre of excellence in tropical and subtropical crops. Its agri-scientific competencies and high quality services have supported, expanded and contributed to the global competitiveness of the South African tropical and subtropical crops industries. Some of the research and development achievements of the Institute recorded over the past 80 years include an award of the Plant Breeder's Rights of the Honey Gold Fruit. The evaluation of the Fruit of Honey Gold on the European markets has proved to be the best new mandarin on the market since 1996.

Students of the Lowveld Agricultural College also stand to benefit from the agri-scientific research and development done by the Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops because it can be used to prepare them for the advent of new technologies and technological changes in their future careers.

This province is another living example of how we can best integrate indigenous and modern scientific knowledge systems. Traditional healers from this Province were among those who collaborated with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in the development of a mosquito-repelling candle. The candle was developed from a plant used for centuries by herbalists in the north-east of our country.

To my dear learners here today, start early to think about what you want to become in future. You do not have to wait until you are in Grade 12 to start thinking about your careers. An early start will enable you to make the correct choice of subjects when you enter the Further Education Band.

I was overwhelmed by the courage shown by 13 year-old Grade 8 pupil Letlhogonolo Mafela, who, unlike many of us, was born without both hands. Letlhogonolo writes with his feet, but can do everything that his classmates at Ramodiba Middle School in the North-West Province can. To the Sowetan newspaper reporters, Letlhogonolo said: "I want artificial arms to become a scientist. Without them, it will be difficult to perform a scientist's duties. I want to be a scientist so people will respect me, and I can live a normal life." Let us live the true meaning of the National Science Week's theme: "Tomorrow's Science and Technology is in our Youth's Hands".

Part of the National Science Week Five-Year Plan (2005-2009) is to develop the National Science Week brand. In advancing this initiative, we now unveil the National Science Week logo.

This logo marks another important milestone in the history of the National Science Week. The logo is not intended to replace the Department's one, but to complement it.

It is now my pleasure to declare the National Science Week 2006 officially launched. I urge all South Africans to find a way to celebrate science and its importance to our lives by participating in the activities of the National Science Week in your provinces.

May I, in closing, thank the Mpumalanga Provincial Government for hosting the launch of the National Science Week 2006.

I thank you.

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