**Social Protection, Community and Human Development Post - SONA Cluster Media Briefing**

Programme Director;
Honourable Ministers;
Deputy Ministers present;
Directors-Generals;
Senior managers;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen;

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Jacob Zuma declared 2017 the year of Oliver Reginald (OR) Tambo as we mark a centenary of his birth. OR Tambo contributed immensely to a society we live in today and he played a key role in shaping the vision and aspiration of a democratic South Africa based on equal opportunities, unity and human rights.

In celebrating Tambo’s contribution to our freedom, we will highlight one of the key attributes of his life and character each month until October- the month of his birth.  Government will host various events around the country and will commence with a Lecture on the Law Master Class of 2017 Opening Ceremony guided by the theme: “OR Tambo’s impact on SA Constitution and legal fraternity”.

The OR Tambo centenary national celebration programme on 27 October will include wreath laying and plaque unveiling ceremony which is coordinated by the South African Heritage Resources Agency.  His statue will also be unveiled at his birth place, Mbizana, Eastern Cape on the same day.  These events will culminate into a Panel Discussion on leaders that have led collectively with OR Tambo.

**Arts, Culture and Heritage sector has a strategic role in social and economic development.**  The sector has the potential to contribute to job creation, reduction of poverty and the eradication of inequality. .

The Department of Arts and Culture has over the past few years undertaken a review of the Arts, Culture and Heritage White Paper.

The revised policy framework highlights the fundamental right of all citizens to access ander4i8i participation in the arts, culture and heritage.

For these reasons, the draft paper is aligned to the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 as well as the National Strategy on Nation-Building and Social Cohesion. To transform and reposition the sector, a multi-dimensional model based on diverse knowledge systems and traditions with an African focus is also outlined in the revised draft policy framework. The department will this year table the White Paper in Parliament and follow all the parliamentary processes.

Programme Director

**The NDP emphasise that South Africa needs to build a more equitable society where opportunity is not defined by race, gender, class or religion.**

As we continue to fight the scourge of racism and build a united nation, our social cohesion community dialogues will continue to take place to bridge divisions amongst communities.  These dialogues will culminate in a National gathering on the Social Compact in 2017, with an aim to reach a social compact for nation-building, social cohesion and to fight racism.

Government recognise youth as important sector of society that can help in attaining nation building and social cohesion. In partnership with National Youth Development (NYDA), the Department of Arts and Culture is leading a **Young Patriots Programme**, centred on shaping and empowering the youth about their history, heritage, arts and culture as instruments for building their nation and fostering national identity.

South Africa is an integral part of the African continent which advocates for a peaceful, vibrant and sustainable Africa. As Minister of Home Affairs pronounced few days ago, government discourage recent outbreaks of violence and is deeply concerned about loss of life and/or damage to property.

Part of our effort to unite African people, government in collaboration with the ministries of culture of Algeria and Gabon will this year launch Cultural Seasons. The programme is aimed at showcasing South Africa’s artistic talent, create an inter-cultural and inter-generational dialogue between the two countries, strengthen cultural relations. The seasons will also promote cultural diplomacy as part of government’s broader socio-economic agenda.

**The shared love for Sport continues to unite all South African and hoist the country’s flag high internationally.**

Sport and Recreation South Africa (RSA) will continue to present the Big Walk and National Recreation Day scheduled for October as one of its flagship programmes to encourage South Africans to lead active and healthy lifestyles.

Community outdoor gyms and children’s play parks programme will be rolled out during the course of the year with the aim of getting people active in local communities.  These outdoor facilities or gyms will be accessible to all to also promote  social interactions and social cohesion.
**Traditional leaders have a crucial role in uniting communities around the country’s goals- including social cohesion and nation building.**

The President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellence Mr JG Zuma, will in terms of section 8 (1) (b) of the National House of Traditional Leaders Act, 2009 (Act 22 of 2009) deliver his annual address to the National House of Traditional Leaders on 03 March 2017. The address of the President will mark the official opening of the house which is also celebrating 20 years of since it was constituted. Emanating from the Annual Address, a Program of Action will be developed and implemented by the House and Department of Traditional Affairs (DTA).

Initiation remains one of the main cultural practices that South Africans still embrace. However many young men who undertake this important cultural journey continue to lose their lives and others sustain serious injuries. From the 2016/17 summer initiation period, approximately 40 deaths were reported, with 29 from Eastern Cape.

The Department of Traditional Affairs (DTA) continues to engage all stakeholders and role players in an effort to ensure that we save lives in line with our Zero Deaths Campaign. We urge parents, legal guardians, potential initiates, traditional leaders and healers as well as all stakeholders across the country to work towards ensuring that this important traditional practice is safer. Government will continue to close any identified illegal initiation schools and we appeal to communities to report such illegal activities to the Police.

**In our efforts to move South Africa towards Universal Health Coverage**, The Department of Health is leading the implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI) which seeks to ensure that all, irrespective of their socio-economic status, have access to healthcare.

NHI is driven by the three main pillars, namely, prevention of disease, promotion of health and entry to health care system at the primary lowest level.  We have learnt from the NHI Pilot since its launch in 2012 and with these lessons; we are confident to take its implementation to the next level.

To date, we have established District Specialist Teams to supervise doctors in each district and further contracted GPs to work in public clinics.  We have also learnt that we also need to contract allied health care professionals like Physiotherapists, Speech Therapists, Oral Hygienists, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, Optometrists, etc.  Other achievements entail finalisation of infrastructural needs for all 700 health facilities as well as refurbishment and backlog maintenance.

Primary Health worker teams have been in contact with no less than 4 million households to check their health status.

The following are the critical stages for the successful implementation of NHI:

* Establishment of NHI fund including reviewing other relevant legislations and inter-governmental functions and fiscal framework that will be impacted by the implementation of NHI;
* Reviewing all the subsidies that medical scheme members receive from the fiscus.
* Consolidating present medical aid schemes first into a few and then eventually one funding pool;
* Making sure that the health care system is re-orientated so that its hearbeat, as mentioned in the White Paper on NHI, is Primary Health Care (PHC);
* Preparation for Purchaser-Provider split. This means a system whereby the purchaser of health services for the population (purchaser) is not the same as the person who actually provide the services (provider) as it is happening presently in the public health care system;
* Completion of the NHI policy paper and promulgation of NHI Bill; and
* Formation of District Health System so that they become the purchasers of health for their population from providers - both private and public.

**Education is a key priority identified by this government towards addressing poverty and inequality as envisioned in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The NDP thus put a special focus on access to quality education outcomes.**

Early Childhood Development Centres play an important role of laying a solid foundation for children during early stages of their lives; which consequently result into well-educated citizens who would in return contribute positively to the overall development and progress of the country.

The National Development Plan (NDP) envisions that by 2030, a full comprehensive age and developmental stage appropriate package of quality early childhood development services is available to all infants, young children and their caregivers.

Comprehensive ECD Programme consist of essential components; namely programmes on health care and nutrition; social protection, parent support and opportunities for learning and playing.  The programme also provides care, shelter and educational needs for children between ages of 0 and 4 years.  Mothers are able to go look for work opportunities or work, knowing that their children are looked after.

In the current financial year, access to ECD centres increased by Forty Two Thousand Nine Hundred and Seventy Two (42 972) children.  By the end of third quarter of the current financial year; One Million Seven Hundred and Thirty Nine Thousand, Seven Hundred and Sixty Two (1 739 762) children had access to ECD centres.

Currently, the country has Sixteen Million and Eighty Eight (16 088) fully registered ECD centres.  Nine Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy Two (9 272) of these centres are conditionally registered which brings the total number of fully registered and conditionally registered ECDs to Twenty Five Thousand Three Hundred and Sixty (25 360).  We encourage those centres that are not yet registered with government to do so.  This will help them with access government subsidy so they can provide comprehensive and holistic ECD services and programmes.

In the current financial year, ECD budget allocation increased to Two Billion, Two Million and Hundred (R2 2 100). National treasury has allocated an additional amount of Eight Hundred and Twelve Million (R812) in the form of a Conditional Grant over next three years of the MTEF. The amount of subsidy is R15 per child for 264 days across the Provinces.

To date, we are proud of the progress made with regards to schools built as part of the **Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Development Initiative (ASIDI)**and the provincial programme**.**ASIDI aims to replace schools in the country built from inappropriate materials.

A total of 173 inappropriate structures have been eradicated through the ASIDI programme, since 2011/12 financial year, while 722 new and replacement schools have been provided through the provincial programme since 2009. In total, 895 schools now provide a conducive learning environment for our children.

The results in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 2015) and the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ IV) show that the performance of South African learners is improving.

* Amongst the participating countries, South Africa has shown the largest improvement of 87 points in Mathematics and 90 points in Science.
* The preliminary SACMEQ IV study results further affirmed an upward trend; and showed that for the first time South African learners at the Grade 6 level achieved Mathematics scores above the significant centre-point of 500 points.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South African schools have become more inclusive and the gap between the top performing schools and the other schools is reducing. Performance trends since 2009 confirm that more youth have access to a school qualification than seven years ago. **We are making progress on the basic education outcomes.**

The National Senior Certificate examination shows that African learners are improving in their performance in Mathematics and Physical Science.  In 2016, thirty three thousand five, hundred and eleven (33 511) learners obtained a mark of sixty percent (60%) and above in Mathematics.

Of this figure, nineteen thousand, seven hundred and ninety (19 790) are African learners.  In case of Physical Science, twenty eight thousand, five hundred and eleven learners (28 511) obtained a mark of sixty percent and above.  Eighteen thousand, seven hundred and thirty two learners (18 732), are African learners.

The aforementioned performance is evidence of the fact that there is now greater stability in curriculum implementation, and the focus going forward will be on professional development of teachers, driven by our 140 Teacher Centres in all the nine provinces.

Honourable Ministers

**South Africa needs strong skilled Human capital that will implement the country’s economic development strategies to reignite the economy and create much-needed jobs.**

We want our youth to be skilled and trained so to that they partake in the critical areas of the economy.

This year, in the wake of a difficult end to the 2016 academic year, the Minister of Higher Education and Training (DHET) held a series of robust engagements with key stakeholders including university vice chancellors, student leadership, college principals and unions, reiterating the importance for open dialogue and for all stakeholders to work together to ensure stability in the system and the success of the academic year.

The meetings discussed a wide range of issues relating to the readiness of the system for the 2017 academic year and the various interventions to assist university and TVETs students financially in 2017.

There was a strong emphasis on government's commitment to funding the 2017 fee adjustments for poor**,** working class and missing middle students at universities and TVET colleges, whose family incomes are below the R600 000 ceiling.

In this regard, the government's fee adjustment grant is allocated to assist students who come from poor, working class and so-called “missing middle” households to pay their fee increases of up to 8% on the 2017 fees. This will be the first time in the history of post-school education and training that families with income levels above the NSFAS-threshold, but who still find post-school education difficult to afford, will be assisted.

To qualify for the grant, university students must apply for the 2017 fee adjustment grant though a form obtainable from their institutions. This grant will benefit more than 75% of university and TVET college students, and in some institutions, more than 90% of students will benefit. Approximately half of the grant will be paid by government to universities in the first quarter of the year to assist them with their cash flows.

Through NSFAS the registration fees for all NSFAS-funded students are paid as an upfront payment to universities and TVET colleges in January each year. Therefore, NSFAS qualifying students will not pay any registration or upfront fees in 2017.

Furthermore, all NSFAS-qualifying students who were registered in 2016, and were successful in their studies, but who may have accumulated student debt with institutions of higher education, will be allowed to register in 2017.

All other students would be expected to pay their upfront registration fees for 2017.

All universities and colleges will develop humane and transparent debt management and relief processes to assist academically successful “missing middle” students who have outstanding student debt to register in 2017, where this is possible.

Students who are academically deserving and struggling financially to pay their registration fees and/or outstanding debt, must engage their university’s finance office to agree upon a repayment plan. The financial sustainability of the quality of universities will be at risk if students do not pay their fees and outstanding debts.

Therefore, institutions have been requested to manage student debt through fair and transparent debt management policies and processes in order to ensure that outstanding student debt is recovered over a reasonable and mutually acceptable period of time, in line with the provisions of the National Credit Act.

All NSFAS qualifying students from the 2016 first time entering cohort should only be registered in 2017 if they have signed their loan agreement forms. Universities need to ensure this is done during registration. Students who do not sign their agreements so that their fees can be released and paid to institutions, cannot be registered.

**The President stated in the SONA that the property sector in our country is valued at approximately R7 trillion, with the subsidised sector being valued at R1.5 trillion**

He however highlighted that less than 5% is owned or managed by black people and Africans in particular. This however is about changed as the Department of Human Settlements is currently working on a draft Property Practitioners Bill (PPB) which repeals the current Estate Agency Affairs Act of1976 to establish a more inclusive representative property sector.

To this end, the Bill strives to create an enabling environment to enhance economic activity within the real estate market which includes residential, commercial and industrial property. The bill further aim to establish a more inclusive, representative sector that conforms to the radical economic transformation agenda.

There is a need to enhance compliance and enforcement to ensure transformation within the sector and to regulate the conduct and behavior of property practitioners.

The Bill has been presented to various committees and the Cabinet’s approval is being sought to publish it for public comments during the course of the year.

On tittle deeds, government will over the next two years prioritise registration and issuing of title deeds to beneficiaries of housing projects to address the increasing delays and backlogs in the system. The Deeds Office has been established to look at how to best to accelerate this process.

The process of amalgamating three Human Settlements’ Development Finance Institutions: Rural Housing Loan Fund (RHLF), National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) and National Urban Reconstruction and Housing Agency (NURCHA) into Human Settlements Development Bank (HSDB).  This process is at a final stage and will be launched in the new financial year.

**Protection and rehabilitation of South Africa’s natural assets will lead to vibrant, equitable and sustainable communities, contributing to food security for all**

The Department of Water and Sanitation is hard at work in response to the President’s directive to arrest the loss of 36% of the country’s potable water by training 15 000 water agents, artisans and plumbers. The DWS appointed Rand Water and the Energy and Water Services Sector Education and Training Authority (EWSETA) as implementing agents for the War on Leaks Project.

This work started in 2015 with the first intake of 3 000 trainees; the second intake of 7 000 trainees was in 2016 and the last intake of 5 000 trainees between May and June 2017. The training is scheduled for five years and therefore will be completed by 2020. This will allow for the envisaged absorption of most of the trainees by the different municipalities where most of the infrastructure failures occur, which municipalities would also in the main be where the trainees come from.

Water conservation is critical for the security of supply for all socio-economic activities and development. As such the training will culminate in the registration of these plumbers and artisans with the relevant professional bodies which will open opportunities far beyond just working for government.

**Government runs effective poverty alleviation programmes to protect the vulnerable groups and citizens from the worst effects of poverty.**

For the Social Development Sector, R457.5bn will be paid over three years starting from the 2016/17 financial year. Social grants now reach close to 17 million people, mainly older persons and children. Many families would not be able to put food on the table if it were not for social grants.

A total of 9 313 511 learners in 20 744 schools benefit from the **National School Nutrition** **Programme**. No-fee paying schools comprise of 87.52% of schools nationally, which means that over 9.7 million learners (78.97%), attending 20 760 schools do not pay school fees.

**The SASSA Payment System** presents an opportunity for the empowering of local communities through local economic development.

It has been reported that government will not be able to pay social grants after March this year. We would like to take this opportunity and reassure South Africans, in particular, social grant beneficiaries that Government will through SASSA continue on its constitutional mandate to administer and pay social grants after March 2017.

**Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) created over 2 million work opportunities for the period April 2014 to December 2016.**

It is important to note that numbers cannot start to quantify the impact of the EPWP in our communities. For instance, the Working on Fire teams that assisted in fire-fighting operations in various parts of the Western Cape in January 2017 contributed in saving lives, protecting property as well as conserving our vegetation in areas such as Stilbaai and others. A number of school children are currently being assisted with their school homework by EPWP’s School Assistant participants who are placed at various schools across South Africa.

The services that are offered by EPWP participants are benefiting communities across the country. These include the social and community health services provided by Community Care Givers under the Departments of Health and Social Development as well as various Non-Governmental Organizations across South Africa. The work opportunities created through the EPWP continue to contribute immensely to the development of our communities.

To achieve sustainable livelihoods for the participants in the programme, government has partnered with various SETAs and private sector companies to provide EPWP participants with skills in various trades such as Artisans, Pharmacy Assistant, Small Business Development as well as Community Care Giving. The type of training provided is aimed at ensuring that participants are armed with skills they can use to enter the mainstream economy.

Over 67% of people who found opportunities in the EPWP between April and December 2016 were women while 44.73% were youth.  Most work opportunities were created in the Infrastructure Sector at 199 196, followed by Environment and Culture at 126 183. The Social Sector created 97 852 work opportunities while Non-State Sector created 74 393 work opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen

**As we have said during the Festive season, South Africans must take the responsibility in leaving healthy lifestyles.**

Abuse of drugs remains a concern for all of us and this has been reiterated by President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address earlier last week.  As a caring government, we have put measures in place in the fight the scourge of drug abuse.

Amongst our interventions, we are establishing Drug Rehabilitation Centres across the country. This is in line with the laws of this country and to our attempt to achieve a society freed of drug abuse.

According to Section 17, subsection 1 of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act 70 of 2008; the Minister of Social Development must establish at least one public treatment centre per province.

To this effect, seven public treatment centres have been established and are already operating in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape provinces.  Government is also working towards the completion of public treatment centres in Free State, Northern Cape, North West and Limpopo provinces.  These centres are expected to be completed during 2017/18 financial year.

**The high rate of fatalities and crashes experienced on our roads remain a stubborn challenge**.

The countless loss of lives and people injured on our roads is a concern to our government. We continue to appeal for responsible behaviour and driving on our roads.

Presenting the 2016/17 preliminary report on road accidents, the Minister of Transport- Dipuo Peters indicated that our traffic law enforcement officers conducted more than 432 roadblocks throughout the country during this past festive period and issued 453 263 fines for various traffic offences. These include drunk driving and speeding drivers.

Government will continue to implement on-going campaigns to ensure that we significantly reduce road fatalities by the end of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety Campaign in 2020.

Road fatalities cost our economy about R306 billion per annum and we need to work together to reduce road accidents.

The Road Accident Fund (RAF) has steadfastly improved claims processing, expanded its footprint and brought services directly to communities at their doorsteps.  This is despite having to cope with complex and legalistic hurdles, spiralling costs, insufficient funding to pay claims and long standing insolvency,

Beyond the money, the value of the Fund’s claim payments has touched lives, evidenced by the fact that over 8,414 funeral claims were paid in the year under review (in the context of 14,000 road fatalities per annum).  However reducing the frequency, severity and impact of accidents remains the Fund’s highest priority, as the estimated cost of road crashes to South Africa’s (SA) economy remains staggeringly high at an estimated R306 billion per annum.

A complete overhaul of the system and new dispensation as proposed by the Department of Transport through the Road Accident Benefit Scheme (RABS) will address the fault-based, unfair and unsustainable system the RAF has inherited as defined by the RAF Act.

A total of R424 million worth of fraudulent claims were identified before payment was made and 391 people were arrested with 231 convicted for fraud against the RAF.

In an effort to combat fraud the Road Accident Fund has reviewed its internal processes, enabling us to identify potentially fraudulent claims and preventing perpetrators from committing fraudulent against the RAF. However, we still need your help in combating this scourge. Whistle blowers guaranteed will be protected

Call FRAUD HOTLINE: Toll free for Call Tip–offs (Anonymous) in 800 00 5919.

The RAF will continue transforming its delivery record while ensuring those who have been injured or lost loved ones in vehicle accidents are cared for.

As government we remain committed to delivering services that will improve the quality of life of all South Africans. We are committed to the goals set out in the National Development Plan. We are fully aware that challenges still remain but as a government we are doing all that we can to bring a better life for all.

Thank you