

**Minister of Public Works
Mr J Radebe
16 March 1999**

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**Visit to the Walmer Senior Secondary School
Walmer Estate, Cape Town**

Members of staff and dear students

Thank you for inviting me to visit Walmer Senior Secondary School once again. I am extremely encouraged by the excellent projects that I saw this morning and I am convinced that the enthusiasm that so many of you have displayed in executing your projects is a healthy indication of the tremendous potential that this school has. I want to urge all of you to develop that potential so that you in your own way can contribute to a new culture of learning in our country.

We are celebrating National Human Rights Week from the 15 March to 21 March 1999. Over the past 5 years our government has been working hard to build a human rights culture in South Africa. As young people you are amongst the most important sectors of our population because you represent our future. It is therefore important that you must be aware of your rights and responsibilities in our new constitutional framework.

Many of your parents and grand-parents and maybe even some of your teachers will be able to tell you of the havoc created by the apartheid policies in the destruction of district six right here on your door-step. Many of the problems that you as young people face today are as a direct or indirect result of those failed and disastrous policies. Everyday you encounter and are witness to drug- abuse, physical and emotional abuse, exposure to life-threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS and gansterism. Such problems threaten to erode the moral and social fabric of the society that we are all trying to build.

Many of you are aware of the crisis here in the Western Cape in particular in dealing with the scourge of drugs and gangsterism. This problem is a very complex one because for many years the apartheid government condoned gangsters and drug-dealers on the Cape Flats. In fact it supported those gang networks for its own intelligence and other purposes. Under such circumstances it was always difficult for youths like you to escape being trapped in the township culture of drugs and gangsterism.

Today, the tables have turned and we can say to our youth that we are creating a new environment and culture in which you have the opportunity to reach your potential. Government is working together with community organisations and NGO's to ensure that in future you will not be hampered by such obstacles. We want to encourage you not to be drawn into the destructive sub-cultures of gangsterism and drugs that will deprive you from enjoying the benefits for which many young people before you sacrificed their lives. You have tremendous potential and South Africa needs everyone of you to live up to that potential so that you can realise your dreams and make a contribution to the upliftment of your country.

I was extremely concerned this morning to read in the media the results of the most recent HIV/AIDS Survey. This latest survey indicates a 65,4 % increase in the 15-19 age group and a national increase of 33,8%. Many of you fall in the afore-mentioned category and one would dread to think of the horrid effects that HIV/AIDS infection would have on your lives. Within five years nearly 5,6 million people will be HIV positive and nearly 2,6 million would have died. I want you to think very hard and seriously about your future and whether you want to be part of those statistics. You must be aware of the dangers of exposure to this disease that threatens your future and the social and moral fabric of our society.

However on a more positive note I want to encourage you as young people to become involved in the many activities of the National Youth Commission that government has set up. One important area of the commission's work is to develop a National Youth Service Programme. Perhaps in your own way you can embark upon projects that could deliver a meaningful social service. Whether that be through environmental protection programmes, social service programmes such as caring for the aged, disabled or homeless street children or through entrepreneurial ventures; In whatever way you occupy yourselves in meaningful activity you will be contributing positively to building a new and positive culture amongst our youth. If our young people adopt such an enthusiastic approach to life there is every cause to be optimistic about the future of our country and all its people.

In conclusion I would like to share with you some words of wisdom by the Poet Iqbal who said:"That nation is not in need of a sword, the character of whose youth is like steel." As young people and the future leaders of our country, the choice is yours. You have the potential to reach the heights of your dreams or the choice to

remain marginalised and frustrated without any vision of a better future. I'm confident that you will make a positive choice for yourselves and for your country.

I thank you once again for inviting me and look forward to visiting you again in the near future.

Thank You!

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