

Speech by Ambassador X Mabhongo at Celebration of Humana People to People Day Vienna 23 September 2010

Mr Karl Schrattenholzer, President of Humana Austria,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet just two days after the world leaders have gathered in New York to reinforce the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals, with education again recognised as one of the prerequisites for the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals. I am referring here to the Millennium Development Goal two, which seeks to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, have access to universal primary education. It is, therefore appropriate that today I should talk on the theme, "Education for All".

African Heads of State and Government also met in South Africa on the margins of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in an Education Summit hosted by the South African President, Mr Jacob Zuma. The gathering was designed to mobilize world leaders to support what is called *1Goal Global Campaign for Education For All*. The initiative sought to utilise the FIFA World Cup to raise the awareness and challenges facing millions of children all over the world who are not able to enter the doors of education.

In New York this week a 12 year- old girl from Soweto, South Africa, Nthabiseng Tshabalala, spoke passionately about the importance of education for all children. Nthabiseng expressed her sad feelings about children who are not able to receive education and mentioned that:

"When I hear about other children who are not able to go to school I feel sad. When children are stopped from going to school, they are losing their future and their tomorrow. I know I am lucky to go to school, and I don't take it for granted. There are millions of children in Africa and around the world who can't go to school. I think that all governments should do everything they can to make sure that all children are allowed to get an education that they need for their futures".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is instrumental for combating many of the challenges facing the world today, for example malnutrition, maternal and infant mortality; and HIV and AIDS. This month UNESCO estimated that if every child could read, 171m children could

be lifted out of poverty in the long run. Put simply, going to school is an effective strategy to fight poverty, famine, disease and unemployment. And for girls, education is nothing less than a life saver, from stigmatism, insecurity, and violence. Education cuts across all others: hunger and health, stability and equality. It can restore social and economic justice. It is indeed a necessity for countering all forms of discrimination including gender inequality.

Also speaking in New York was the South African Minister, H.H. M Nkoana-Mashabane, and she recognized that for South Africa, the MDGs dovetail with the developmental approach adopted by Government since the end of apartheid, which is embedded in our constitutional provisions, including the Bill of Rights, which guarantees, inter alia, the right to a basic education, including adult basic education. Minister Nkoana-Mashabane also noted in this regard that South Africa believes the MDGs should be an integral part of a comprehensive, long-term oriented development strategy and that quantifiable targets should be accompanied by a dedicated attention to improving the quality of delivery. The MDGs should help close the gap between the rich and the poor within countries across the world.

To ensure the constitutional right is translated into reality, last year, President Zuma identified it as one of the five apex priorities of Government. In fact, it is so central that the attainment of the other priorities, namely creating decent work and sustainable livelihoods, rural development, land and agrarian reform, health and the fight against crime and corruption are dependent on it in one way or another.

I am happy to inform you that an area in which we have been most successful is in facilitating universal access to primary education, a target which we reached before 2015 deadline. This demonstrates that we are on track to achieve or even exceed this MDG target. What is more impressive with the achievement of this target is that the proportion of girls attending primary, secondary and tertiary education has improved significantly, with the participation of girls being one of the highest in the world.

Thus, the attainment of the MDG target on education is significant for a number of reasons. Education is central to development and can serve as a catalyst to address gender disparities. Moreover, education is the primary vehicle by which vulnerable children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate meaningfully in the economy. For this reason the South African Government has taken a proactive stance to ensure that in addition to the attainment of the numerical targets, our investment in education is accompanied by a concomitant improvement in the quality educational outcomes.

Over the past ten years the international community has registered significant strides regarding access to and gender equality in primary school education, with an estimation that 42 million additional children are enrolling in school every year.

However, there are approximately 72 million children, almost half of whom are in Africa, who are not attending school. In addition, more than 700 million adults across the world do not have basic literacy skills. Based on these figures, it is unlikely that the MDG target of Education for All, including universal primary education and gender equality in education, will be reached by 2015 unless we all redouble our efforts, working as Governments and through international partnerships.

It is only through partnerships with international NGOs such as Humana People to People that the world could be able to put 72 million children to school. I am pleased that Humana People to People is already involved in many educational initiatives in the African continent. In South Africa, Humana runs several programmes including Child AID Community Project in Limpopo Province that encompasses vocational and other educational aspects. They are also currently supporting the construction of community centre in Tubatse in Limpopo. This project will include library and host community empowerment activities such as training.

These activities are highly valued by us.

I encourage you all to continue to find ways to support educational initiatives worldwide, even if it is something as simple as depositing your old clothes at one of the Humana collection sites.

I thank you!