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# **ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE NURSE AND MIDWIVES**

**12 May 2020**

**King Edward Hospital**

Hon Deputy Minister Dr Joe Phaahla

All the MEC's in the Provinces

Members of the Media

And, last but certainly not least The Nurses  
and Midwives of South Africa, the Continent  
and the World

We are here today to honour the men and  
women at the frontline of health care- nurses  
and midwives

The critical role that nurses play in protecting and caring for our communities cannot be overstated.

In many ways, they are the face of healthcare.

Today marks the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the foundational philosopher of modern nursing, who was born 200 years ago. Florence, also called “The Lady with the Lamp”, was called in 1854 by the Secretary of War, to organise a corp of nurses to tend to the sick and fallen soldiers of the Crimean War.

In South Africa and across the African continent, we also remember Cecilia Makiwane on this day.

On 7 January 1908, Makiwane became the first black woman on the African Continent to be licensed as a nurse.

Born in Alice, in the Eastern Cape, Makiwane lost her mother at an early age and was raised by her father. She studied first as a teacher before discovering her calling in nursing.

An early activist for women's rights and in the anti-pass movement, Makiwane is remembered for her indomitable spirit and her unwavering dedication and commitment to the craft.

Today, Makiwane's memory reminds us of our strong legacy of black excellence in the profession which we must continue to advance in everything that we do.

We also remember the 20 nurses who heeded the call from Tanganyika and made the voyage to Tanzania in 1961 at a time when the country faced a nursing crisis after British Rule ended. Two of these nurses are from this province of KwaZulu Natal- the late Edna Miya who worked at King George and Sister Cecelia Ntombenhle Khuzwayo who is now 83 and worked at King Edward. We salute you for being ready to serve the diaspora.

As a department, we recognise the need to prioritise the nursing profession along with the wellbeing of nurses; and strengthening nursing

education, training and practice is one of our strategic objectives

Regrettably, our war against the COVID-19 Epidemic has cost us lives of our health workers.

On behalf of my department, I would like to dedicate this day to all our nurses, especially those nurses who have lost their lives to the pandemic.

Their contribution to the fight against the pandemic is immeasurable.

May their families and loved ones find strength in shared memories and may their souls rest in internal peace.

In 2019 The World Health Organization (WHO) designated 2020 as the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife”, in honour of the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale.

The year 2020 is significant for WHO by recognising the critical role nursing and midwifery play in strengthening Universal Health Coverage.

The plan for 2020, is to improve the public's understanding of the contributions nurses and midwives make in the societies they live in.

The global epidemic calls for a different approach to celebrating nurses, the real leaders of the world to health.

We will listen as our nurses tell us their stories, under the theme "Voice to Lead: Nursing the World to Health.

I take this opportunity to commend all nurses in our country for your contributions to the health and wellbeing of our Nation in general, and your efforts in the combat against the pandemic.

For most of our communities a nurse is the first to be seen at the time of birth. A heartbeat of the health system throughout the lifespan providing preventative, curative and rehabilitative care, and often the last to help close our eyes at the time of end of life.

In her book titled "Divided sisterhood: race class and gender in the South African Nursing

profession,” Shula Marks argues that the nursing service in any country, provides a lens through which one can gain an understanding of the dynamics of the interplay between the context of care, the provider of care and the recipient of care.

The COVID-19 epidemic is a case in point. As the whole world is called to wage a war against Covid- 19 our nurses, consistent with the theme of the international year of a nurse and midwife, individually and collectively as members of the epidemic response team have given their all in the various stages of our response from community to facility level.

Your compassion and kindness as you listen and allay fears and anxieties associated with scary news of testing positive to Covid-19 infection does not go unnoticed.

Your compassion and comfort to patients who cannot be with their loved ones at the bedside through the journey of Covid-19, is the best

gift to our patients, a gift that no amount of money can buy.

As you nurse our communities during the pandemic, your personal touch is more palpable as you provide a broad range of essential health services, ranging from administering oxygen therapy, ensuring the patient is in the best position for optimal lung function and by being the only health professional privileged to hold the hands of those who succumb to the unseen enemy of our world.

Of the 18 million or more health workers required to achieve and sustain universal health coverage by 2030, almost half of the shortfall are nurses and midwives.

The International Council for Nurses (ICN) warned of a potentially catastrophic shortage of nurses over the next decade and urged governments to act swiftly to turn the situation around.

I would like to commend the South African National Coronavirus Command Council, led by our President his excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, in cooperation with the National Minister of Finance and Treasury who urged all provinces to fill the frozen and vacant posts required across all levels of care for the duration of the pandemic and beyond.

I am aware that all provinces are finalising their recruitment for both the day to day health services as well as capacity for case management during the anticipated surge of the pandemic.

While the pandemic has magnified the cracks and exposed the impact of unequal distribution of resources between public and private sector, we are resolute in ensuring that all health professional are provided with appropriate personal protective equipment and the requisite tools of trade.

As we celebrate our nurses and midwives I would like to affirm our commitment to ensuring that no nurse will be allowed to care



for patients without appropriate protective equipment, be it at community level during screening and testing or in a health facility.

While nurses have always worked under intense psychological pressure, the current pandemic is making extraordinary demands on them both physically and mentally.

While it is understood that over time, the threat of infection will reduce, we also know that the mental health impact of this crisis will remain.

Retaining and supporting the nursing work force requires a focus on promoting and protecting their physical, mental and spiritual well being.

We are committed to support them to deal with any immediate physical and mental health issues, and prevent some of the mental health consequences that may not be apparent now but may emerge in the future.

In this regard we have prioritised development and implementation of the comprehensive programme for caring for the carers.

Through this programme our frontline health workers would be provided with a safety net across the continuum of care. We would also like to commend our social partners who have extended support specific to our nurses during this difficult time.

A health system's claim to resilience stems from a resilient workforce.

No matter where you are or what area of nursing you work in, you can, and do, make a difference to the public that you serve.

Thank you all for that you do well on a daily basis.

It takes courage to be a nurse: in the words of Mary Anne Radmacher “Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’”

Within the nursing fraternity I am aware that a number of slogans for the year of the nurse were framed to celebrate their own, ranging from #Be that nurse #Nurse for life; #Nurses save lives, #Once a nurse, always a nurse.

In appreciation of your service as government we undertake to give you adequate training, ensure sufficient protection and appropriate recognition of your contribution in the service of the nation

To all the nurses of South Africa Africa and the world we say a big

**THANK YOU!**

for carrying the burden of the COVID 19 outbreak and serving humanity

We appreciate the choice you made to carry the burden of saving lives during our weakest moments in our journey on earth

We salute you for the professionalism with which you execute your nursing art and provide the backbone of our health services

We salute you for your caring heart and the warm smile that eases the pain and heals the suffering

We salute you for being the source of hope and strength in the dark days of hopelessness and ill health and often being the last to hold the hand and close the eyes on that last moment that concludes our final chapter on earth

We salute you for your dedication and selflessness with which you give your all to serve the others

We salute you for your caring spirit of Ubuntu

South Africa salutes you and thank you sincerely

May God abundantly bless you and richly reward you and give you strength

Nurses of South Africa I salute you!

Thank you