

**Statement by the convenor and chair of the press briefing:
Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia
Head, Higher Education HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS)**

at the HEAIDS Summit

**28 November, 2011
Port Elizabeth**

Mr Mahlubi Mabizela, the Department of Higher Education's Chief Director: University Policy and Development, who is representing the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize, Professor Brian O' Connel, Chairperson of the HESA-HEAIDS Strategic Group and Vice Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape,

Ladies and Gentleman -

On the eve of World AIDS Day, when humanity unites across the globe to remember the tens of millions who have lost their lives in the greatest public health crisis of our times and re-dedicating itself to increasing awareness, reversing discrimination, and expanding access to treatment, care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS, I thank you for availing yourself for this briefing on the ongoing response of the higher education sector to the pandemic.

We would like to brief you in particular on our contribution to the 2012-2016 National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs and TB that is to be launched on World Aids Day on 1st December and, on our plans for the "First Things First" HIV Counselling and Testing campaign that will be rolled out at higher education institutions in 2012.

To address you, amongst other things, on our plans for the "First Things First" campaign for 2012, we are honoured to have Mr Mahlubi Mabizela, the Department of Higher Education's Chief Director for University Policy and Development, who is representing the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize.

And to address you on the interventions at higher education institutions that will support the new NSP, we are pleased to have Professor Brian O' Connel, the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape and Chairperson of the HESA-HEAIDS Strategic group.

The Higher Education HIV/AIDS Programme, HEAIDS, is a national initiative to develop the capacity of South Africa's higher education sector to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic and to mitigate its impact on higher education institutions and, correspondingly, on society as a whole. It is an initiative of the Department of Higher Education and Training and is undertaken by Higher Education South Africa (HESA), which represents all of South Africa's 23 public higher education institutions.

HEAIDS has its roots in higher education institutional programmes that began in 2000 and was established to comprehensively support university HIV/AIDS programmes, including in relation to :

- capacity development
- advocacy
- prevention
- voluntary counseling and testing
- treatment, care and support
- curriculum development
- workplace programmes
- community outreach
- research
- and monitoring and evaluation.

Today, all 23 public higher education institutions are represented at a HEAIDS summit here at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University as part of the 6th SAHARA Conference.

The aim of the HEAIDS summit is to consolidate our commitment and contribution, as a sector, to the 2012-2016 National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs and TB. This plan, to be launched on World AIDS Day on 1 December 2011, is inspiring in the goals it sets.

The National Strategic Plan echoes this year's theme for World AIDS Day, "Getting to Zero", and proclaims a 20 year vision for reversing the burden of disease from HIV, STI and TB in South Africa. It aims for "Three Zeros":

- Zero new HIV and TB infections
- Zero deaths from HIV and TB
- Zero discrimination.

I believe these goals reflect the progress made in South Africa against the pandemic and its impacts and, asserts our resolve to decisively overcome it going forward from this platform. As the Higher Education sector we are today practically re- committing ourselves to playing our part in the national effort toward these goals of the NSP.

The 2012-2016 NSP takes into account South Africa's development agenda and the relationship between it and HIV, STIs and TB. From the point of view of the Higher Education sector, its central contribution to national development is skilled human resources.

Our sector is made up of over 1 million students, academics and service and administrative staff. Our students, who form part of the age demographic that is most vulnerable to HIV infection, represent the future skills and knowledge base of South Africa. Our academics are among the most developed of South Africa's human resources. Supported by service and administrative staff who facilitate the role and development of these advanced human resources, the higher education community as a whole is vital in the national campaign against HIV/AIDS.

The NSP also asserts the role of education in mitigating HIV vulnerability which Mr Mabizela will brief you on, on behalf of the Deputy Minister.

Over the next five years, on the road to the “Three Zeros”, the National Strategic Plan aims to achieve a number of specific goals related to prevention; treatment, care and support; and the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.

As a sector we have been implementing programmes that address all of these goals and commit ourselves to scaling up all aspects of our programme over the next five years. This includes the strengthening of research efforts to find a cure, which is a signal role for higher education institutions.

To this end, our summit today is addressing five specific areas through which the goals of the NSP will be promoted. These are:

- Mobilizing the leadership of all sections of the higher education community
- Social, cultural and behavioural change
- Academic curriculum and research
- Positioning HR as a strategic driver for Workplace Programmes
- and Innovative communication responses

It gives me great pleasure now to invite Professor Brian O’ Connell, the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape and Chairperson of the HESA-HEAIDS Strategic Group to address you in more detail on these and other interventions at higher education institutions.

Thank you.