

Seminar on Life skills for youth social inclusion and employability

Speaking points for HoD

Date: 17 May 2016 / registration from 8:30, opening at 9h00, networking reception from 17:30

Venue: The Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria

- Let me tell you how delighted I am to open this seminar that testifies of **how high youth is on the agenda of the EU** in general, and in South Africa in particular. I am particularly glad to see several young faces in the audience today and I am sure you will bring vivid testimonies during the debates today.
- Youth is as important for the EU as it is for South Africa. Almost 60% of the SA population is below the age of 34, and 55% of the working age population is composed of youth: these two figures say it all –youth represents the more **formidable opportunity** of SA but is faced with **many challenges**: unemployment; high drop-out rates from school; inadequate skills; high rates of violence and substance abuse, HIV exposure – we all know the difficulties.
- The EU Delegation in South Africa works in close cooperation with the **Departments of basic education and higher education as well as the Department of Health** on many aspects such as early childhood development, school health, health promotion, teacher education, skills planning and development, student exchanges. We also have a good cooperation with the **Department of Labour** to promote employment and entrepreneurship through strong public employment services. I am pleased to see representatives of the Government in the room today. And of course -Director General Vries - we are currently engaging with your Department on designing a programme for employment promotion through SMME support.
- We also work actively with **civil society organisations** that are present in communities, and working with them, and that can make a positive difference in the life of young people and reinforce advocacy. Glad as well to see many of CSO representatives here today. I am sure we will hear a lot from you during the day.
- So why this seminar today? We took this initiative to place emphasis on an aspect of skills development which is sometimes overlooked when it comes to education at large, employment support initiatives, women empowerment... and that is **Life skills**. I am talking here about the ability to make rational life choices and to confidently face life challenges, to develop self-esteem, to develop the capacity of resisting negative social peer pressure, to develop adequate capacity and sufficient resilience to enter the job

market or follow the path of entrepreneurship. In other words **all those skills that enable young people take control over their life** and make a positive contribution to society. We feel these are crucial pre-conditions for any programme targeting youth to deliver effectively. But I leave it to this seminar—as we often say in South Africa—to 'unpack' this idea and further explore it.

- SA is not alone in addressing youth related issues. **Europe** as well has a dynamic youth that wonders about its present, let alone its future. More than 5 million young people in Europe do not have a job at this moment. This is around one in five of the young persons in Europe. In some European countries we are confronted with youth unemployment rates of around 50 percent. Europe also faces serious issues of youth social inclusion as the number of vulnerabilities and threats increases.
- It was particularly important for us to bring expertise and share experiences from organisations active in Europe on some of the issues of the seminar.
- I am very pleased that the **European Pact for Youth** is present with us today: Ms Celia Moore and Mr Jacques Spelkens, warm welcome! The European Pact for Youth is a recent high-level initiative co-chaired by the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Ms Marianne Thyssen, and Mr Etienne Davignon, President of CSR Europe¹. It is a **mutual engagement between business leaders and EU leaders**, together with numerous supportive organisations from Business, Education and Youth **in support of youth employability and inclusion**. I am also pleased to welcome Ms Isabelle Palanchon who is a specialist in France of life-long training. I am sure that you will bring very useful insights from Europe to the discussions today.
- I do hope that this seminar will bring **productive discussions** and, importantly, **recommendations** for action and areas of possible support from our side and EU Member States, some of which are present today. This is very important in order to support South Africa roll out its National Development Plan 2030 and its National Youth Policy 2015-2020, the motto of which is "We are generation 2020, we don't want a hand-out, we want a hand up!" I also do hope that this seminar will sow the seeds for a **dialogue** between Europe and South Africa as we can share so much in our joint efforts to ensure a brighter present and future for our youth.
- To conclude I would like to mention that this seminar is part of a series of events that are part of 'Europe weeks' in South Africa, and very importantly our contribution to events leading up to the Youth Day on 16 June, marking this year the 40 years of the Soweto uprisings.

¹ CSR Europe is the leading European business network for corporate social responsibility with 50 multinational corporations and 45 national partner organisations as members. Its mission is to help its member companies to integrate corporate social responsibility into the way they do business, every day.