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## Statement on the Cabinet meeting of 22nd August 2007

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23 August 2007

Cabinet held its ordinary meeting in Cape Town yesterday morning, 22nd August 2007.

Cabinet noted that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State Summit was held in Lusaka last week which discussed a number of important policy issues affecting the region. Regional economic integration featured prominently at the Summit and the Heads of State resolved that all countries must take measures to accelerate integration of the region's economies. The Summit witnessed the launch of the SADC brigade (SADCBRIG) which will be part of the African Union standby force to ensure peace and stability in the region and the continent.

Cabinet noted that President Mbeki's report on facilitating the Zimbabwean talks was well received by the Summit. Contrary to misleading and sensationalist media reports, the report indicated that the facilitated talks between the Government of Zimbabwe and the opposition were on track and was confident these talks will deliver an agreement that will lay the foundation for free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

Government once again categorically rejects the allegation that President Mbeki had blamed the British government for the problems in Zimbabwe. This is simply not true.

Cabinet reaffirmed the South African government position that the solution to the problems of Zimbabwe will come from Zimbabweans themselves agreeing on the steps to find a lasting solution for their country. In this regard, Cabinet took a dim view of the misleading and fictitious reports in some South African media which claimed that the SADC Heads of State were divided on the way forward on Zimbabwe. If anything, the Heads of State are united in their resolve to do what is necessary to help Zimbabweans to find a lasting solution to the socio-economic and political problems. Having accepted the report, the Summit resolved that in addition to the facilitated talks, the SADC Ministers of Finance would conduct a more detailed assessment of the economic conditions and to identify any possible action required regarding the economic recovery in Zimbabwe.

Cabinet noted that the Bi-National Commission meeting between South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo took place in Kinshasa from 20 to 21 August 2007 and was led by the President and attended by 12 Ministers. At the end of the Commission meeting, a number of partnership and co-operation agreements were signed, ranging from education, health, governance, transport, finance, trade and security cluster related matters. Cabinet noted that the relationship between the two countries was solidifying for the benefit of both countries and the region.

The meeting noted media coverage regarding the dismissal of the former Deputy Minister of Health, particularly the misleading assertion that government's programme on HIV and AIDS was under threat and was driven by a single member of government. We repeat, the programme will not collapse following the departure of the Deputy Minister of Health. Cabinet reiterates the entire government's commitment to the implementation of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) remains firmly in place. This Plan is implemented rigorously in partnership with all of civil society, as co-ordinated by the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) and the Inter-Ministerial

Committee, under the leadership of the Deputy President of the Republic, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. As part of this ongoing work, designated national departments met this week to consolidate the NSP implementation plans and their message was loud and clear: they will not be distracted from doing this important work.

Furthermore, Cabinet took a dim view of the distasteful media coverage around the Minister of Health, particularly, the unlawful publication and theft of her medical records from the hospital. Whilst Cabinet fully endorses free speech as articulated in our Constitution, there is a need to maintain a balance that respects and protects all rights, including the right to privacy and free speech. These rights must be respected and observed by all, including the media. The sacrosanct principle of doctor-patient confidentiality must be respected at all times and its application cannot be dependent on a person's class, position, gender or race.

The sensationalisation that characterised these media reports was patently motivated by a highly personalised desire to demean the person of the Minister of Health. In this regard, the decision by the Minister of Health to take the Sunday Times newspaper to court is a legitimate way of ensuring that clear parameters are set on the balance between the rights to privacy and to dignity, especially their application to public figures, and free speech.

In Cabinet's view, the conduct of some political parties, in particular the Democratic Alliance, also left much to be desired. It is deplorable, albeit predictable, that the new leader of the opposition has chosen the courting of media headlines over responsible leadership. She has elevated rumour and gossip to fact and further insinuated that the President of the Republic had manipulated hospital staff and other professional clinicians to allow the Health Minister to have a liver transplant. This allegation against the President of the country is spurious, irresponsible and Cabinet accordingly rejects it unreservedly.

Cabinet noted the progress the country was making in empowering women in all sectors of our society. As part of celebrating August as women's month, the following highlights were noted: the launch of the South African Women Lawyers' Association; the launch of a project by the Justice Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) cluster to train more women as managers in the police service; the training of women judges; Jobs for Growth women's project; and SA Tourism's initiative to identify and highlight opportunities for women in the Tourism sector, under the theme 'Tourism opens doors for women.'

Cabinet approved the Operational Plan for a National Mass Literacy Campaign. Eighty thousand tutors will be engaged to enable 4,7 million adults to achieve basic literacy and numeracy by 2012, at a cost of R6,1 billion. An Inter-Ministerial Committee, chaired by the Minister of Education, will oversee implementation of the plan. The plan will be launched by the Minister of Education in the near future.

The meeting noted that the 'blow the whistle' initiative between the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Primedia was yielding positive results with more than 100 arrests within two months after the launch. Government commends Primedia and SAPS for the initiative, and more importantly, those members of the public for making the project a success by calling the toll free number to give information about crime.

The following appointments were approved: Mr M Mogane, Deputy Director-General in the Department of Social Development; Ms K Venier, Deputy Director-General in the Department of Public Enterprises; Mr A Moodley and Mr M Nkosi as Deputy Directors-General in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The following Bills were approved for submission to Parliament: The National Regulator For Compulsory Specifications Bill and the Standards Bill.

Ministerial media briefings on the government's Programme of Action will be held during the week of 27 August 2007 in Cape Town.

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