ESWATINI CAPABLE OF OWNING ITS OWN SATELLITE – TIYANDZA

By Melisa Msweli

ShakthiSAT participant Tiyandza Melokhule Ndlovu has said the country can build its own satellite and develop its space science capabilities if resources are made available for research and innovation.

Ndlovu, a learner from St Theresa High School, made the remarks yesterday when she showcased Eswatini's first satellite cube after representing the country in Mission ShakthiSAT in India.

Mission ShakthiSAT is a global space education initiative by Space Kidz India, bringing together 12 000 girls from 108 countries to participate in satellite projects and gain exposure to space technology, STEM and space exploration. The programme is designed to give young women practical exposure to satellite engineering and related fields.

She said her participation in the international programme had shown her that the kingdom has the potential to venture further into space science, but would require resources and research to turn the ambition into reality. Ndlovu stated she had learnt that some countries had satellites, but did not always know what to do with them, something she said she did not want to see happen in Eswatini. She said the country should, therefore, focus not only on developing a satellite but also on ensuring that it had the knowledge and capacity to use it effectively. Ndlovu further said the country could explore different ways of getting technology into space, including launching a payload carried by a balloon. During her participation in ShakthiSAT, she said participants were also given an opportunity to leave a message on the satellite. Her message was: *"Maswati lamahle*, space is not just our imagination, one day we will have a satellite of our own." Ndlovu said the statement was more than just a message because she believed the day would come when Eswatini would have its own satellite.



Minister of ICT Savannah Maziya and Head of Chancery at the High Commission of India Ajay Kumar Sharma with ShaktiSAT participant Tiyandza Ndlovu, who received a trophy for her achievement.

"I hope I am not crazy. It will happen one day," she said. Speaking during the press conference, Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Savannah Maziya congratulated Ndlovu for representing the country in the programme.

Maziya said Ndlovu had distinguished herself by outshining 108 international students and welcomed her back from India. She said Ndlovu had learnt to build a satellite cube and would now be expected to share the knowledge she had gained with other young people in Eswatini.

"Tiyandza, you learnt to build a satellite cube. You are now our trainer to empower other young people in Eswatini to reach for the stars," Maziya said.

She thanked Ndlovu for representing Eswatini, saying her participation had put the country on the map and in orbit.

The minister also urged the young people who had benefited from science and technology programmes to share their knowledge with others for the benefit of the country. Head of Chancery at the Indian High Commission, Ajay Kumar Sharma, said Eswatini had made a significant contribution to Mission ShakthiSAT and congratulated Ndlovu for distinguishing herself through her technical aptitude and dedication.

Sharma said the mission provided opportunities for young people to develop skills in satellite technology, space systems, electronics, data and aerospace engineering. He said such skills could be applied in areas including telecommunications, earth observation and environmental monitoring. Sharma described Eswatini's participation in ShakthiSAT as a new dimension of India–Eswatini cooperation, adding that it complemented existing cooperation in areas including capacity building, education and ICT. Ndlovu, who is currently in Form V, also received a 75% scholarship to study at Botho University following a commitment secured for her at the request of Minister Maziya in recognition of her achievement.