



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Educators' Convention held in Durban at Olive Convention Centre.**

**28<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

Programme Director,

Dr Dingindawo Paulus Shongwe, President, Southern Africa Union Conference,

Esteemed Educators, and Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stand before you today, I am imbued with a profound sense of history and purpose. This year, as South Africa commemorates thirty years of democracy, a reflective mood envelopes our nation.

As a nation, we recollect the struggles that gave birth to our freedom, celebrate the victories we have won, and, most importantly, contemplate the road ahead.

We are fully aware that we have yet to conquer persistent challenges and the inherent weaknesses of the human spirit; we acknowledge the social ills that blemish the vibrant tapestry of our rainbow nation.

These struggles are a stark reminder of the work that remains before us, urging us to persevere in our quest for a society that truly reflects the resplendence of its diverse hues – a nation where every individual is granted the opportunity to thrive, unfettered by the constraints of circumstance or history.

It is within our grasp to cleanse these stains, to weave a new chapter in our nation's narrative, defined not by our past afflictions but by our current resolve and hopes for the future.

Nonetheless, we are proud of our past and confident of our future.

Programme director, our democracy, like the great Baobab, has taken root in the fertile soil of our will to succeed as a nation, drawing nourishment from the rain of our collective efforts and the sunlight of our aspirations.

Yet, as with any living thing, it requires constant care and nurturing. In this context, the seminal role of basic education is undisputed – the very sap sustains the tree of democracy.

Former President Thabo Mbeki, one of the architects of our modern nation, once said, “I am an African... I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land.”

His words resonate deeply as we mark this momentous anniversary of our democracy. They remind us that our freedom is intrinsically tied to our identity and continuous growth as individuals and as a society. Basic education hones this identity and nurtures this growth; thus, it is the bedrock of our freedom.

The vision of a democratic South Africa was built on the foundation of hope, faith and the spirit of perseverance. As we journey through the three-decade-long narrative of our democracy, we observe the profound transformation that education has undergone.

Education in South Africa is no longer the privilege of a few; it has become a right – an open door to every willing mind, irrespective of race,

creed, or economic standing. We have truly opened the doors of learning for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in shaping this narrative cannot be overstated. You have been the torchbearers of an education system that reflects the principles of our democracy – equality, respect, and the freedom to explore and question.

In your institutions, students find more than just classrooms; they find communities of learning, sanctuaries of thought, and the freedom to dream.

The impressive expanse of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's commitment to education is a testament to the values we hold dear. Operating 9,489 schools, colleges, and universities, with 111,360 dedicated teachers nurturing the minds of over two million students across the globe, is no small feat.

This monumental achievement speaks volumes about your dedication to imparting knowledge and wisdom. The Southern Africa Union, encompassing the vibrant cultures and spirits of Lesotho, Eswatini, South Africa, Namibia, and St. Helena, plays a pivotal role in the governance of this educational powerhouse.

Within this region alone, your stewardship extends to 36 schools and two higher educational institutions, providing a beacon of hope and enlightenment to a significant cadre of educators and learners alike.

As Solomon wisely put forth in (Proverbs 2:6): “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” It is this wisdom that we seek to embed in our curriculum, in our teaching, and in our policies. It is this wisdom that will carry us forward as a nation – a wisdom that is both a reflection of our past and a blueprint for our future.

Education in the African context has always been more than just learning; it has been a tool for liberation, a pathway to understanding, and a means to navigate the complexities of our shared humanity.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been an integral part of this educational journey. Your contributions transcend the mere imparting of knowledge; they embed a moral compass and a spiritual map within our youth.

As the Book of Isaiah (54:13) so elegantly states: “And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD, and great shall be the peace of thy children.”

This verse encapsulates the divine mandate of education – not just to inform but to transform, not just to teach but to touch hearts and guide spirits.

Reflecting on our educational strides since the advent of democracy, we can indeed be proud. The tapestry of our educational landscape is as diverse as it is rich, adorned with the successes of those who have risen, often against considerable odds, to claim their right to knowledge and progress.

But we cannot ignore the challenges that lie before us. As we approach the critical national and provincial elections on 29th May, we are reminded that with our vote, we express not just a preference for one party or another but a commitment to policies and practices that will uplift our nation – and at the heart of this upliftment is education.

Let's all go out and cast our ballot to secure a future for our homeland. Casting a vote is not just an act of civic duty but a powerful declaration of hope and aspiration for the nation's future. It represents each citizen's role in shaping the destiny of their homeland, emphasizing the collective strength found in the democratic process.

By participating in elections, individuals exercise their right to influence governance and policy, ensuring their voices contribute to the foundation of a society that mirrors their values and visions for progress. This act of voting is a cornerstone of democracy, underlining the significance of each vote in securing a brighter, more equitable future for all.

Programme director, the Seventh-day Adventist education system, which places a high premium on the development of character alongside intellectual growth, resonates with world-renowned Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's adage about the potency of literature.

Achebe's assertion that "My weapon is literature" encapsulates the transformative power of education - suggesting that beyond mere knowledge acquisition, it is the moral and ethical fibres woven into the fabric of learning that arms students for life's challenges.

This holistic approach advocates for a form of scholarship where literature and character education combine to forge individuals equipped not only with the acumen for success but with the virtues that underpin a just and compassionate society.

Such an education does not solely create scholars but also cultivates citizens who wield the pen and their principles with equal proficiency,

echoing Achebe's reverence for literature as a force for personal and societal change.

It is this ethos that has led Adventist institutions to produce individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally robust and spiritually fortified.

In doing so, you have created an oasis of excellence in a world that often values expediency over integrity.

Ladies and gentlemen, the value of an education rooted in spiritual values cannot be overstated. Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town Desmond Tutu, a son of this soil, once remarked, "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." It is this 'little bit of good' that each educator imparts that collectively transforms nations.

The biblical King Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, advised in Proverbs 9:9, "Instruct the wise, and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous, and they will add to their learning." This principle of continual growth and improvement drives the Adventist educational philosophy.



As educators, you stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, faith and inquiry, spiritual grounding and intellectual exploration. Your role is pivotal in creating a generation that, while firmly rooted in the rich soil of heritage, is reaching out to the skies of future possibilities.

As stated by the Ghanaian diplomat and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a statement during the 1997 World Bank Conference, Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society, in every family.”

This quote reflects his belief in education as a cornerstone of societal and familial advancement. This understanding underpins our collective mission to enhance the quality of our basic and higher education and broaden access to it for all children and youth, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Furthermore, as we celebrate this milestone in our democratic journey, let us remember the words of the Kenyan environmental, political activist and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, “Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instil in them even more respect for it; because educated people are in a position to understand what is being lost.”

In this spirit, let us commit ourselves to an education that respects our past, secures our present, and anticipates our future.

A holistic education that the Adventist Church has so nobly pursued. An education that is not an end in itself but a means to a greater end – the betterment of humanity.

As we gather here in Durban, in the camaraderie of fellow educators and scholars, let us renew our pledge to each child and each teacher.

We will uphold the sanctity of our profession,

We will strive for excellence,

We will work tirelessly to ensure that every learner can rise to the full height of their potential and

We will do so with an eye on eternity.

The Adventist philosophy of education encourages not just a quest for knowledge but for wisdom – for as the Bible tells us, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

It is this wisdom that we seek to instil in our children – a wisdom that transcends the mere acquisition of facts and figures.

Ladies and gentlemen, today, we are not merely participants in a conference; we are the guardians of a legacy. We are the custodians of the future.

As we depart from this convention, let us carry with us not just the memory of our time together but a renewed commitment to the sacred task that lies before us.

Let us educate with heart and soul; let us teach as though every lesson shapes the future; let us approach every day in our classrooms with the knowledge that we are sculpting the cornerstone of our democracy.

In conclusion, I leave you with the words of the esteemed Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who powerfully stated, “Education does not change the world. Education changes people. People change the world.” Through our collective efforts, shared dedication, and unwavering faith, we will indeed change the world, one educated child at a time.

Thank you for the honour of speaking to you today.

May God bless our endeavours, our educators, and our beautiful nation of South Africa.