basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the SADTU Gender Policy Conference held at the Southern Sun Hotel, Pretoria

8th March 2024

President: Cde Magope Maphila

Deputy President: Cde Mabutho Cele

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Vice President (Sports, Art & Culture): Cde Nolitha Mboniswa

Comrades and Compatriots

Distinguished Guests

It is a distinct honour and privilege to be here today, addressing the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) on the occasion of International Women's Day and the Gender Policy Conference.

It is a privilege that I don't take for granted.

Comrade, Chairperson, I would like to extend my appreciation to the leadership of SADTU for initiating a crucial gender policy dialogue to foster a positive learning and teaching atmosphere within our sector.

Your invitation to partake in this significant discourse is greatly valued.

As I have said before, SADTU is a revolutionary union that prides itself on fighting for the underdogs.

This includes the masses of our people, the working-class poor, the unemployed, the unskilled, and the lumpenproletariat.

Comrade Chairperson, we gather at a critical juncture in our country as we prepare for the crucial provincial and national elections 2024, which are precisely 81 days away.

Since the Democratic Breakthrough, our country has had the privilege of voting for a democratic government six times in an environment of relative calm.

Local and international observers have repeatedly declared our provincial and national elections free and fair.

To secure a bright future for generations to come and honour our forebears who sacrificed life and limb for our freedom, I call upon all members of SADTU, every teacher, every student/learner of voting age, and every South African to exercise their democratic right to cast a ballot.

Comrade, Chairperson, we also converge on a momentous year when our country, despite challenges, celebrates 30 years of freedom, peace and prosperity.

As we celebrate, we must remain mindful of the Congress Movement's historic mission to create a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, and prosperous South Africa.

We will not rest on our laurels until every child's potential has been unleashed, every family has a working adult, every home has a job, every learner has completed matric, every student has earned a degree, every city hosts a factory, and every school boasts a functioning school governing body.

Comrade Chairperson, we also gather here today on International Women's Day, and it is by no coincidence.

The longest-serving President of our Movement, Comrade Oliver Tambo, once opined, "The struggle to conquer oppression in our country is weakened by the traditionalist, conservative, and primitive restraints imposed on women by man-dominated structures within our movement."

He added, "because of equally traditionalist attitudes of surrender and submission on the part of women."

If we delve into the 2024 International Women's Day theme, you can sense that Comrade Tambo was a visionary. In short, the 2024 them says #Inspire Inclusion.

Put differently, that means do not succumb to patriarchy. In 2024, there is no space for male-dominated structures, no tolerance for traditionalist attitudes, or conservative ideologies that seek to subjugate women and girls, as Cde Tambo said so many years ago.

We must all become combatants for inclusion, not poster boys of patriarchy.

The organisers explain this year's theme: we forge a better world by inspiring others to understand and value women's inclusion.

And when women themselves are inspired to be included, there's a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment.

Collectively, let's forge a more inclusive world for women.

In essence, there's an acknowledgement that women in 2024 have not yet secured their place at the main table.

The challenges they face are significant, even though they form the majority, cast more votes, manage households, raise children, and perform what is called unpaid labour.

It's a sad indictment of a society with the world's most progressive Constitution, which condemns discrimination, discourages exclusion, and promotes equality.

Comrade Chairperson, SADTU's gender policy conference presents us with an opportunity to introspect as leaders and as men, custodians of patriarchy.

Indeed, it's time for us to critically examine our own biases and behaviours.

Yes, we must "smell our own armpits."

Kumele sizinuke amakhwapha.

It is we (us) who perpetuate patriarchy. We are the culprits who limit the girl child's imagination, not allowing it to stretch beyond the moon.

By, we, I mean those who have access to power, and as former President Thabo Mbeki once said, including those who have access to those who have access to power.

We teach boys not to cry, implying that showing emotion is akin to being weak.

In other words, don't "be a sissy."

As holders of power, we often unwittingly communicate to our children that being a woman is something to be ashamed of, with remarks like, "Ah, you are a grown woman now, ready to marry."

This may seem like a mundane thing, but it does suggest that women are being bred for the entertainment of men and bearing babies.

Instead, the appropriate message should be, “You’re a grown woman now, ready to unleash your creativity to the world. Be an astronaut.”

This week, the international news media celebrated the first Arab woman astronaut.

Like her ancestors, Emirati astronaut Nora AlMatrooshi has always been captivated by the stars, dreaming of lunar expeditions.

This week marked her historic achievement as she graduated from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) rigorous training programme, poised to venture into the vastness of space.

In 2024, how, in Nelson Mandela’s name, can we allow women to remain “hewers of wood and drawers of water”?

First woman astronaut in the whole of the Arab world in 2024?

Back home, how many Joslins out there have been traded like a stock on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange?

I’ve heard disheartening jokes from men about how women, during their menstrual cycle and supposedly being in an “emotional” state, could not possibly manage a multinational corporation.

Asizinuke amakhwapha, Sihlalo.

The simplicity of my message belies the fact that I am targeting the guardians of patriarchy, in other words, the system that is rigged in favour of men.

These are the very same men responsible for gender-based violence.

Comrade Chairperson, I am not suggesting we throw out the baby with the bathwater.

As a democratic government, we have made huge strides, but challenges abound.

For instance, it is heartening to note that women currently hold 71% of all educator roles within ordinary public schools.

Furthermore, women represent 56% of School Management Teams (SMTs), and sadly only 41% of Principal positions, and 66% of Departmental Heads (HoDs).

While the journey towards the full inclusion of women, especially in Principal roles, demands further progress, significant strides have been made since the Democratic Breakthrough.

Our continuous efforts towards achieving equality and equity in the educational domain remain imperative.

Regrettably, gender-based violence, alongside violence in its entirety, poses a substantial challenge to the efficacy of our educational processes.

Such violence is increasingly manifesting within our schools, mirroring its prevalence in our broader communities.

It is observed not only on school grounds but also en route to and from schools, within the students' homes, and their wider communities.

The repercussions of societal violence are inseparable from the school environment, as schools are reflective of the communities they serve.

This correlation partly explains why teachers, too, have fallen victim to severe violent acts by some pupils, a situation we unequivocally condemn.

Ensuring teachers' safety is as critical as providing students with secure learning environments, allowing educators to fulfil their roles without the threat of assault or disrespect.

The emergence of bullying, including cyberbullying, as a prevalent form of violence further jeopardises the safety and well-being of our students.

Acknowledging the heightened vulnerability of girls to gender-based violence, rape, abuse, and the risks of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, it is clear that preventative measures must be intensified.

Since the advent of democracy, considerable emphasis has been placed on the safety and educational advancement of the girl-child, leading to gender parity in educational access and achievement.

Girls have consistently outperformed boys across several educational metrics and are more likely to complete various scholastic stages.

Since 2008, female students have secured more bachelor-level qualifications in Grade 12 than their male counterparts.

This trend has been expanding and underscores the need to focus on the boy-child's educational and protective needs against violence.

To eradicate violence from our schools and society, we must embrace a comprehensive approach that includes safeguarding the well-being and education of the boy-child alongside our efforts for the girl-child.

Comrade Chairperson, we have a robust policy and legislative framework to guide us towards the Promised Land of Women's Inclusion and eradicating Gender-Based Violence.

Programmatically, we have introduced several initiatives to combat gender-based violence in schools, offering a comprehensive and multifaceted approach.

These initiatives, grounded in human rights principles, have been integrated into the curriculum through subjects such as Life Skills and Life Orientation across all grade levels.

Among the key initiatives are:

The Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools was established to provide schools, districts, and provinces with clear procedures for addressing sexual abuse and harassment.

This includes responses to incidents involving learners and school staff, guidance on identifying, intervening, reporting, and supporting victims, and addressing perpetrators effectively.

The Prevent Violence in Schools Programme addresses various forms of violence, including corporal punishment, bullying, and gender-based violence, encountered by learners.

The Speak Out Against Abuse Advocacy Programme educates learners about their rights and actions to take if they face sexual harassment or assault.

The Child & Youth Agency Planning Framework aims to empower young people to become active, engaged citizens who contribute to sustainable development.

It encourages increased representation and participation of student councils in addressing social justice issues in schools and communities.

The Girls and Boys Education Movement (GBEM) enables learners to use their social influence among peers to effect positive changes within their communities and themselves.

The Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education Programme focuses on early interventions to prevent the perpetuation of negative biases, social injustice, harmful gender norms, and unequal paths to success in adulthood.

The Bill of Responsibilities Programme, based on the Bill of Rights, teaches learners that rights come with corresponding responsibilities.

These initiatives underscore our commitment to creating safer, more inclusive educational environments by addressing and preventing gender-based violence and promoting human rights and equality.

Comrade Chairperson, as the government, we wholeheartedly endorse the comprehensive objectives of the South African Democratic Teachers Union Gender Policy Conference.

These goals are to devise strategies that address and ultimately eradicate gender-based violence and sexual harassment in schools, in addition to reducing teenage pregnancy.

This effort is in collaboration with our numerous partners, which include the South African Council for Educators (SACE), the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), and the Labour Research Service (Gender @ Work).

According to the organisers, SADTU also seeks to comprehensively review existing policies, including the SADTU gender policy, to identify shortcomings and develop mitigation strategies for implementing the International Labour Organization's Convention 190 (C190).

Interestingly, you also aim to make a significant contribution to the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBV-F), ensuring a unified and comprehensive approach across various sectors of the government.

I am heartened by SADTU's desire to adopt and share strategies from Education International (EI Africa) designed to promote inclusion and improve gender equality within the union.

I am immensely proud of SADTU and extend my heartfelt wishes to you all as you embark on your endeavours to construct a nation that prioritises the safety and inclusion of women.

Your dedication to this noble cause is commendable, and I am confident that your efforts will lead to positive and lasting change.

May SADTU live long enough to realise a vision of seamless inclusion of women in all spheres of life.

Long live SADTU!
Long live the Tripartite Alliance!
Long live the ANC!

Amandla!!!

Ke A Leboga
Dankie
Siyabonga
I thank you.