

**OPENING AND WELCOME COMMENTS AT THE NATIONAL INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION SUMMIT: REPOSITIONING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A
MECHANISM TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL**

“Accelerating inclusive education: Leaving no learner behind”

BY

**THE HONOURABLE DEPUTY MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION
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ON

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Programme Director

Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga, MP

Minister of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane

MECs for Education

Director-General, Mr HM Mweli

Heads of Provincial Education Departments

Deputy Directors-General present

Senior Officials from National and Provincial Departments

**Leaders and representatives from organisations of persons living with
disability**

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to welcome you to this inaugural 2021 National Inclusive Education Summit which marks the commitment of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in collaboration with the Department of Women, Youth and Person with Disabilities (DWYPD) on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially learners in our schools, towards their right to access quality education.

Securing the rights of persons with disabilities is necessary for upholding the values and principles of the United Nations Charter and our Constitution. This is why we have invited you all, important stakeholders in education, together with organisation for and representing persons with disabilities, to this important Summit. This Summit

is aimed to bring about lasting and transformative change in the Basic Education sector work on disability inclusion, across its policies, programmes and operations.

The Summit will further get a report which provides a first comprehensive assessment of disability inclusion as contained in the White Paper 6. It will present an honest picture of where we are and shows where we need to improve, and we need to improve a lot.

Programme Director, the COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting communities and societies at their very core, deepening pre-existing inequalities. Even under normal circumstances, the one billion persons with disabilities worldwide are less likely to enjoy access to education, healthcare and livelihoods or to participate and be included in the community in all its dimensions. They are more likely to live in poverty and experience higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse. And, when crisis grips communities, persons with disabilities are among the worst affected. This pandemic is exacerbating these inequalities and producing new threats.

I have no doubt that the learners, teachers and support staff in the basic education sector have similarly experienced the disproportionate impact of the pandemic. The Minister of Basic Education has called for our response and recovery to be more disability inclusive.

Promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities means first of all recognizing and protecting their rights. These rights touch on every aspect of life: **the right to go to school**, to live in one's community, to access health care, to start a family, to engage in political participation, to be able to play sport, or to travel -- and to have decent work.

We must also ensure that the vision and aspirations of learners living with disabilities are included and accounted for in a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world. This vision will only be achieved through active consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. And so we must ensure their full participation of persons with disabilities and their organisations in decision-making processes. And as we move forward, we must take a whole-of-

society approach to ensuring disability inclusion. Only by working together – government departments, entities, civil society, including also the organisations of persons with disabilities, the private sector and communities of experts – can we effectively implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and tackle the obstacles, the injustices and the discrimination that persons with disabilities experience.

Realizing the rights of persons with disabilities is crucial to fulfilling the core promise of the NDP vision 2030: **to leave no one behind**. In all our actions, our goal is clear: **an education system in which all persons can enjoy equal opportunities**, participate in decision-making and truly benefit from economic, social, political and cultural life. That is a goal worth fighting for. As we set out to implement the 2030 Agenda, persons with disabilities must be recognized for what they are -- effective agents of change whose contributions bring enormous benefit.

Programme Director, we need to account for persons with “invisible” disabilities whose needs and voice are often left unconsidered and unheard. The theme for this day says it all: ***“Accelerating inclusive education: Leaving no learner behind”***

Let the message from this Summit be clear: Together, with persons living with disabilities, we can achieve an inclusive, accessible and sustainable quality education for all. This Summit should therefore discuss how we – as the Department of Basic Education and interested stakeholders – can fight discrimination and remove the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing quality education.

We are also here to ensure that learners with disabilities are given equal access and voice in schools, so that they can realize their fullest possible potential. The United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of the landmark Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 was a critical moment. The fact that this is the fastest ratified treaty in the world, now being implemented by over 90 percent of UN member states, including South Africa, is a powerful demonstration of an issue that all countries can embrace and help realise.

The Convention's guiding principles couldn't be more pertinent: non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; equality and accessibility; respect and dignity; and the respect for difference and embracing disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity. Indeed, to realise the promise of the 2030 Agenda – and its core pledge to leave no one behind - it is essential that all peoples, particularly those facing discrimination and exclusion, have access and voice and can participate equally in every aspect of life, including education. This is a matter of justice, and equal opportunity, as well as economic growth. Otherwise, the costs of exclusion are simply too high.

Ladies and gentlemen, I therefore invite you to engage in the critical areas of accessibility, look at our policy, planning and operational frameworks; programming and issues of data; and capacities to see what works and what we can do better. I am also pleased to that a review has already been initiated and will include perspectives from across the provinces, entities and NGOs present here on how we are supporting learners with disabilities in our schools. This is critical as we consider how to make a difference in the education of learners with special education needs.

While we have travelled a long way in our journey to realising the rights of learners living with disabilities, we all know there is further to go. At times it may seem impossible to reach our destination, but I am certain that with the concerted efforts of all of us – and under the guidance of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations – a basic education system free from discrimination and marginalization of learners, teachers and support staff with disabilities is within reach.

“Nothing about us without us” is the mantra of this Summit and I would like to close my remarks by assuring you that we – the Department of Basic Education - stand behind this, and with all of you, as we move this important agenda forward together.

Programme, let me welcome all delegates and take this opportunity to present the Minister of Basic Education, Mme Angie Motshekga to render the keynote address

