



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, to commemorate Youth Month at Laban Motlhabi School, Kwa-Thema, Springs

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Programme Director

MEC for Education in Gauteng, Mr Panyaza Lesufi

Member of the Mayoral Committee in Ekurhuleni, Cllr. Brandon Pretorius

Ward Councillor, Mr Thulane Ndunjane

Junior Councillors Khathutshelo Ramanala, Nitara Moodley, Zuko Ntshikila

Representatives of the Margaret Gaza family and the Foundation

Vice Dean of Education at University of Johannesburg, Prof Tumi Diale

Acting Deputy Director-General for Care and Support, Ms Coceka Nogoduka

Chief Director, Dr Patricia Watson

Senior Officials and colleagues from national and provincial education

District Director, Ms Somikazi Chabalala

District officials

School Principal, Mr Mpatlanyane

Members of the School Governing Body

Partners and Stakeholders

Teachers, learners, parents and caregivers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good day / Dumelang/San'bonani/ Avuxeni/ Molweni!

We are gathered here today to commemorate the hard-won gains of the democratic state that we live in. This event is organised in collaboration with the Gauteng Provincial Department of Education, Gauteng East District, and the School that supported the planning.

Nelson Mandela once said: "The Youth of today is tomorrow's future." Lack of unemployment opportunities is still one of the critical challenges affecting South African youth. The youth has entered an already strained job market with declining employment opportunities. Our youth are not equipped with the necessary skills that match the demands of the emerging employment market, contributing to the high unemployment rate today. The coming generation is not motivated to pursue their studies, witnessing the hardship endured by their siblings. Reforming education and ensuring that all young people, regardless of their background, can afford a good education is a step in the right direction to eradicating some of the economic challenges unique to the South African youth. In the context of high levels of structural disadvantages, such as in South Africa, resilience among children and

youth becomes increasingly essential to buffer children and youth from the adverse effects of adversity.

There is an imbalance between the wealthy and poor in South Africa. In terms of access to technology, a great deal of work is still required to close the digital divide in society. It continues to affect the youth and any chance for them to change their lives and be able to find or create work in the market, stifling our society's entrepreneurial vision. Indeed, we live in a digital and knowledge-based society. Education has a crucial role in ensuring that our young people today are prepared with resilient skills to participate in the socio-economic platforms that will be created in the future.

In the Department of Basic Education, the commemoration of Youth Month is embedded in Chapter 2, Section 9(4) of the Constitution, which provides for the Right to Equality so that learners may be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Our operational framework of *Care and Support for Teaching and Learning* (CSTL) enables us to heighten our efforts towards the realisation of a *Rights-based, Safe, Healthy, Socially Cohesive and Inclusive School Environment* and attempt to eliminate many vulnerabilities faced by our youth, such as:

- bullying and school-related gender-based violence;
- Early and unintended pregnancies (EUP) and HIV;
- Stigmatisation and discrimination

Today, the Government and all its partners have come to Laban Motlhabi School to mark this year's Youth Month after the actual 16 June commemoration was commemorated by the President of the Republic in Mthatha this week. We come in the spirit of seeking ways to work together better, moving forward, to improve the educational quality and the lives of our young people.

In 1995, the 1st democratic Government declared that 16 June would commemorate Youth Day. To serve as a reminder of our country's progress regarding equality and equal opportunities for all youth and to honour the youth who had lost their lives during the Soweto Uprising.

The 16 June 1976 Uprising, which began in Soweto and spread countrywide, profoundly changed the socio-political landscape in South Africa, influenced by the youth. Events that triggered the uprising can be traced back to policies of the Apartheid government that resulted in the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953.

Therefore, on 16 June each year, as South Africans, we celebrate Youth Day to commemorate the Soweto Uprising, where thousands of students who became politically conscious and began mobilising themselves marched peacefully, and unarmed to demonstrate and protest against the Government's directive were ambushed by the heavily armed police of the then apartheid regime;

The Government is working with all sectors and partners to rebuild community safety and restore widespread peaceful coexistence and social inclusion. It is significant even today that we still do so to pay tribute to the thousands of young lives sacrificed and their essential role in the liberation of South Africa from the yoke of the apartheid regime, but in particular for quality learning and teaching. It is even more significant because 16 June has since been declared a National Holiday in South Africa - **Youth Day!**

Youth Month takes place at a time when media coverage is focused on youth unemployment at an all-time high, and youth restlessness and despondency are setting in. Much focus on society's growing distrust in Government and youth loss of faith in government interventions means that the media remains hostile to the work of Government in supporting youth development. The 2022 call to action continues to encourage the youth and media to follow Youth Month conversations and stay engaged on all platforms where the messages are communicated. As outlined in the theme: *Promoting sustainable livelihoods and resilience of young people for a better tomorrow.*

With so much inequality perpetuated by racism, xenophobia, gender stereotypes, harmful gender norms, discrimination and related intolerances, young people seem to face many obstacles stacked against them, preventing them from reaching their full potential. In its transformational agenda on social cohesion and nation-building, we collaborate with the Department of Justice and Constitutional

Development, the South African Human Rights Commission, National Consultative Forum of SGB Associations and Principals' Associations, South African Council for Educators, UN Organisations and Foreign Country Development Agencies to redress equity and equality matters. Youth Month is also International Pride Month. We recognise the difficulties children of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities face in our seemingly heteronormative schooling system and are keen to change that. The Council of Education Ministers has endorsed an intensive consultative process on the new *Draft Guidelines for the Socio-educational Inclusion of Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) in Schools*. As our Constitution dictates, no one is to be discriminated against due to several factors, including being gender diverse. In that way, our Constitution compels us to be people who respect each other. Therefore, DBE must ensure that all learners are protected in schools. Given the LGBTQI liberation history of Springs and KwaThema, it is no coincidence that we mention this on this occasion.

As we commemorate this Youth Month today, despite the support given to our youth through the youth development agenda, many challenges remain, especially regarding their health and wellbeing, which becomes a hindrance to achieving resilience and sustainable livelihoods. Our youth continue to face many vulnerabilities such as HIV infections, Early and Unintended Pregnancies, Gender-Based Violence and Alcohol and Drug Use. As a government, we need to enhance our efforts and empower young people to protect themselves

against these. I am delighted that today we are engaged in the Let's Talk EUP dialogue. This campaign provides a platform for us to engage learners in finding solutions to protect themselves against unplanned pregnancies to realise their educational aspirations.

Therefore, Gauteng as a Province is the launching pad of this critical work, which UNESCO supports, and we intend to reach other provinces. The Let's Talk EUP Campaign is a social behaviour and communication campaign. It enables us to use innovative ways to engage young people, including the use of social media and digital platforms, which are occupied by our youth. Through this campaign, we aim to tap into young people's energy and agency in addressing their challenges through learner leadership engagements, which AGAPE Youth Movement also supports. As these dialogues unfold, we intend to use our digital social media platforms like our YouTube Channels, Facebook Pages and our DBE TV channel to continue spreading the message of the prevention of EUP, HIV and GBV. We do so while promoting access to education, sexual reproductive health services and rights for young people, including the role of boys and young men in preventing EUP. We also intend to engage with Policy Makers to ensure our progressive policy environment is realised through effective implementation.

Before the COVID-19 period in 2019, we managed to reduce teenage pregnancy rates through a combination of interventions by the Government and social partners. Still, the COVID-19 situation in our

country has had a negative effect on the gains that we previously achieved towards the prevention of HIV infection, learner pregnancy and gender-based violence. We remain greatly concerned that our society does not do enough to value the voice of young people in finding solutions to these problems.

Besides the usual rhetoric of patriarchy and toxic masculinity, which we need to address through the promotion of positive masculinities, the aspect of self-esteem has been identified as one of the causal factors of gender-based violence. That is why in our psychosocial support and social cohesion interface of programmes, we have prioritised interventions aimed at building young people's self-esteem. Although social media has been a powerful tool of development in the 4th Industrial Revolution, we are aware of the adverse effects it has had on the increasing cyberbullying and body shaming. Young people seem to be battling resilience against these challenges.

As a sector, we are indebted to our youth for holding the fort under highly challenging conditions to keep working on the solutions. Our young people can still do well in life regardless of the situations that seem to be not-so-conducive to good life outcomes. We need to work together to build resilient young people, able to take their rightful place in our society.

I thank you.