

Address by the Hon SW Lubisi: Speaker of Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature during People with disabilities parliament

2 December 2010

Programme Directors

Hon Members of the Executive Council present here today

Deputy Chairperson of Committees, Hon. RM Mtsweni

Honourable Members of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature

Leadership of formations of organised persons living with disabilities in Mpumalanga Province:

DPSA, DEAFSA, COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, EPILEPSYA

Leadership of the broader Civil Society Organisations

Distinguished delegates to this Parliament for People Living with Disabilities

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and privilege for me to speak to you during the year 2011 Parliament for People Living with Disabilities. Allow me profoundly thank the leadership in the disability sector for their unwavering commitment towards the successful hosting of this event. The Parliament for People with Disability constitutes one of the main calendar events of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature.

As we host this event, I wish to pay a special tribute to the late leader of Disabled People of South Africa who sadly passed away earlier this year; Mr. Elijah Makhubalo Thobela who was a leader and cadre of the civil society movement. It is my firm belief that in the event of time the people of Mpumalanga, Mbombela and Matsulu in particular shall accord this gallant fighter for the rights of people living with disability the honour that befits his contribution to the broader society.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The rights of the People Living with disabilities are enshrined in Chapter 2 of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa through the Bill of Rights furthermore South Africa has been a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since the year 2007.

Over the years South Africa has put in place numerous legislations which sought to address the plight of people living with disabilities among others the Employment Equity Act, of 1998 and the Social Assistance Act of 2004.

However Disabled people in South Africa continue to face enormous challenges. The increased recognition levels and statutory guarantees through enactment of laws are yet to transform into sizeable change across all the target areas especially in education, the economy, health and employment.

Our sectoral Parliament for People Living with disability is convened on the eve of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on the 3rd of December 2010 which calls upon every person to live to the promise and make everybody business. The United Nations has called upon the citizens of the global village to keep the promise: by mainstreaming the disability in the millennium development goals the Millennium Development Goals towards 2015 and beyond"

Ladies and Gentlemen

Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which focuses on Work and employment compels States Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

If we truly seek to achieve equality and rights of people living with disabilities, we must first make an assessment of the circumstances that we find ourselves in at the current trajectory, in order to pursue

that objective, we have during this sectoral parliament accorded you an opportunity to deliberate on the continued public sector and private sector's inability to radically increase opportunities of employment in the for people living with disabilities.

Indeed, the time has come to assess whether the current employment equity targets are still relevant in the South Africa discourse. The bigger concern is that both the public and private sector management has converted the employment equity targets for people with disabilities into permanent targets of achievement and has not successfully moved beyond the set targets.

The employment of people with disabilities goes hand in hand with social transformation and eradication of poverty. It has the potential to produce multiples of dividends for the society. It can benefit both the disabled people as individuals and the society at large. Increased employment opportunities for people living with disabilities have profound and positive impact on the character of the society and their families.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities further entrust signatories with the responsibility to safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation. As I have earlier stated that South Africa has continuously pursued the agenda of the rights and privileges for people living with disabilities through legislations passed by parliament, however, we need to critically engage all the laws that we have passed including Employment Equity Act and thoroughly assess its impact on the wellbeing of people living with disability since its enactment in the year 1998.

I must indicate our general concern that whilst there is notable progress, our country as a whole has not fared generally well in achieving increased employment for people living with disabilities both in the public and the private sectors. It is however gratifying to note that there has been a level of notable progress in the retail sector, in this regard I wish to quote the Minister of Higher Education Dr. Blade Nzimande at the Thabo Mbeki Development Trust for Disabled People and the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training authority (W&RSETA) certification ceremony, held at the Pyramid Conference Centre on the 1st of July 2010 when he said "The big companies in the wholesale and retail sector such as Makro, Game, Builders Warehouse, Jumbo and the Smollan Group must be applauded for taking the lead and employing people with disabilities and making great efforts to accommodate their special needs in their places of work". We should therefore also extend our appreciation to these companies and encourage other sectors to follow suit. I think those of us residing around Nelspruit can also bear witness to this observation.

Compatriots

One of the fundamental requirements for achieving increased employment of people living with disabilities is the issue of education and skills. This therefore calls for integration of or mainstreaming of skills development and the education of people living with disabilities within the broader education framework.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities compels signatories to Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training; and to further Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment. We must therefore expand our focus from the goals and initially address the issue of education and skill as one of the predetermining factors for increased employment of people living with disabilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The relationship between HIV and disability has not received due attention, although persons with disabilities are found among all key populations at higher risk of exposure to HIV in the world.

According to World Health Organization Disability and HIV Policy briefing, there is an estimated of 650 million people, or 10% of the world's population, have or are living with a disability.

According to the Publication of the Global Partnership for Disability and Development Publication "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Article 1) [2]. Disability is, therefore, not only caused through impairment but also the environment which does not provide equal access to health, education and judicial services as well as employment and recreation. This increases vulnerability to a number of issues including HIV and AIDS"

It is a fact that continued inaccessibility to proper and quality treatment have a great potential of aggravating the health status of individuals to temporal or permanent disability. Furthermore, the progression from HIV positive to full blown AIDS result in people developing various impairments which result in them being unable to perform some task unaided.

Programme Director

While South African Government has develop a number of programs and conducting countless awareness campaigns, health education, HIV and AIDS treatment initiative and many other efforts to curb either the spread or treatment of those already infected. Such services are not equal accessed by those living with disabilities due to either the attitudes of health workers towards people living with disabilities.

Even where knowledge of HIV is high among persons with disabilities, this does not always translate into use of HIV testing and counselling services due to inaccessibility to people living with disabilities and infected with HIV. In some cases the NGO's and some health practitioners or workers that deal with implementations of intervention programs on HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support and mitigation at most don't target people living with disabilities, as they don't consider issues of people living with disabilities as their issue. Sometimes it is because of one or more of the following that add difficulties to people living with disabilities in particular:

- Inaccessibility of buildings and structures used by service providers, or government employees
- Inaccessibility of the information, for example awareness based interventions that have a strong component of information; education and communication have not looked at the needs of the blind, the deaf and the mute.
- Disabled girls and women are at an increased risk of HIV infection. As women they are a marginalized group who do not have a lot of choices even relating to their bodies and their rights. Society accords them low status, having a disability just compounds the situation.

The continued belief that People with Disability are at lower risk of HIV/AIDS infection is therefore unfounded and should be dispelled, we must develop sector based advocacy and education campaigns for people living with disability and encourage testing and voluntary counselling especially for those that are at higher risk like young disabled girls.

The Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress, dealing with the character of the National Democratic Revolution, noted amongst others that; Among the most vulnerable in society are children and the elderly, and a national democratic society should ensure their protection and continuous advancement.

Such is the challenge in relation to people with disability –not merely as a matter of social welfare; but based on the recognition of the right of each individual to dignity and development and of the contribution that each can make to the collective good.

It is therefore important to approach the place the HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, support and treatment programmes at the centre of all support and mobilisation programme targeting people living

with disabilities. Indeed we are all at risk and we are all affected by HIV/AIDS including people living with disabilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I hope you will seize this opportunity and set achievable targets for both the Government and yourselves as organisations. Let me also say the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature has developed a Public Accountability and Oversight Model And the Public Participation Model. It is our hope that through this mechanism we will see increased participation of People Living with Disability in the activities of Mpumalanga Legislature. I invite you to use this legislature as your voice and a repository for democracy and human rights. Working together we can do more.

Since we are meeting at the time where we moving closer to the end of the Year allow me to take this opportunity and Wish you a Joyful Festive Season and a Prosperous New Year. Remember to act responsibility and be safe during this busy time of the year.

I thank you