

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR VUSI MKHATSHWA, MPL, ON THE OCCASION OF CELEBRATING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AT MASOYI PROTECTIVE WORKSHOP HELD IN MASOYI, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Tuesday, 30 November 2021

Programme Director, Mr Themba Mdluli of the Sitimisele Disability Centre;
Representative of the Executive Mayor of the City of Mbombela Local Municipality;

Acting HOD of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Ms Gugu Mashiteng;

Chief Director of Business Regulation and Governance in our Department, Ms Brenda Mabaso and her team;

Chairperson of the Masoyi Protective Workshop, Ms Mbuyane and her team;

Other distinguished guests;

Government officials present;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

San'bonani!

1. Programme Director; It is, indeed, a great honour for me to address this gathering, on this important occasion to mark our national disability month. South Africa commemorates **National Disability Rights Awareness Month** from 03 November until 03 December annually. This culminates into the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** on 03 December, which we will celebrate in just two (2) days-time. This day is also commemorated as the National Disability Rights Awareness Day.

2. The observance of the month of November, as the month for people with disabilities, is thus very significant because it **aims to promote awareness and understanding of disability issues, and to mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.**
3. As we celebrate this significant day, under the theme: ***“The Year of Charlotte Manny Maxeke – Create and Realise an Inclusive Society Upholding the rights of Persons with Disabilities”***, we must recognise that these vulnerable group within our society, is able in a different way; their disability does not make them different from the rest of us. Arguably, all of us have a certain degree of disability; it is just that our disability is not clearly visible for others to see.
4. Programme Director; internationally, the 2008 ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was therefore a major milestone in the **promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms** of people with disabilities.
5. We are also pleased that **our country has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, and was identified as one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the Convention. This responsibility, therefore, requires South Africa to set up systems and institutional mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention.
6. As a country, we are expected to report to the UN on the implementation of the Convention. Provinces must also report to the national government, so as to contribute to the country’s report. As provinces, we

are therefore required to have our systems in place. We thus commit that will ensure that our country, honours all the National and International commitments and protocols, such as the **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women; Convention on the Rights of the Child; and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

7. Our government's Disability Strategy is designed to ensure that **people with disabilities are supported** to enable them, as far as possible, to lead full and independent lives, so that they can reach their full potential as individuals, and to participate fully in society. This represents an important step forward, in delivering the Government's commitments to the full integration of people with disabilities, in all aspects of society.
8. After the April 2009 general elections, our government further demonstrated its commitment to issues of disability, by **establishing a Ministry to solely focus on addressing issues of women, children and persons with disabilities.** We must now ensure that adequate resources are allocated to promote the interests of these targeted groups.
9. Since 1994, our democratic government has endeavoured to build an inclusive and socially cohesive, democratic society through a process of socio-economic and political transformation. We aim to establish effective institutional mechanisms for social and economic empowerment, equalisation of opportunities and access to resources for persons with disabilities.

10. We commit to continue to work with other departments, provincial and local government, the private sector, municipalities, organised labour and civil society, in mainstreaming issues of disability. This, we do, because we **subscribe to the notion that persons with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to our society**; and many of them have demonstrated that capability. As individuals, they wish to be treated like all other citizens, and have equal opportunities afforded to them.
11. Programme Director; our country's progressive world-revered Constitution **guarantees all South African citizens the right to enjoy equal status; to be fairly treated and to have full access to both social and economic opportunities**. We must, therefore, ensure that persons with disabilities are included into the mainstream of South African society, and eradicate all the barriers that hamper the achievement of their full potential.
12. We must, unashamedly, emphasise that persons with disabilities must be integrated in every aspect of the political, social, economic and cultural life of the society. To this end, we must **implement stringent monitoring and evaluations systems**, to ensure that we keep the different sectors accountable for their indicators, through sector-specific disability objectives and indicators, that will see departments and municipalities collaborating in providing quality services to persons with disabilities.
13. Failure to achieve these targets is not an option, if we are to remain true to our vision of an inclusive South African society, where we treat everybody equally. In most societies, it is commonly found that people

with disabilities live in poverty, and are victims of discrimination, abuse, neglect and marginalisation. We must fight this anomaly with all our might, to **ensure adequate care, protection and support for people with disabilities.**

14. We further commit to continue to **strive to achieve a better future for people with disabilities**, through collaborative partnerships between non-government organisations and the community.
15. No one, no matter how determined they are, will succeed in holding you back from realising your goals and your dreams, as people with disabilities. Your disability does not determine your future.
16. Programme Director; that is why I believe we can all play a part in the inclusion process:
 - **By including people with disabilities, like we do to other members of our community, as part of our lives, at school, work or in community and sporting activities;**
 - **By working with disability advocacy organisations to achieve positive change; and**
 - **By supporting the many areas in all levels of government, and in the private enterprises by facilitating change.**
17. As I close, let me also take this opportunity to **encourage all of us to spend our hard-earned money wisely**, during the fast-approaching festive season. We must always remember that December is just one of the months of the year; and that the **most difficult financial period lies ahead in January**, when we will be expected to pay school fees, and buy other school necessities for our children.

18. Please **do not buy what you want, but rather buy what you need**. Do not be swayed by sales nor be enticed to buy on credit unnecessarily. Be a disciplined citizen!
19. And when to **indulge in alcoholic beverages, please also do that responsibly**, as many people get injured or even lose their lives, during that time. If you can resist the temptation of drinking alcohol, good for you. If you also entertain yourself through **betting and gambling, do that responsibly** as well.
20. Gambling is just a game; it is not the means to get rich. Do it to a certain limit, because gambling was really never established to make anyone rich. It is merely meant to entertain you; to keep you busy. **Only a fraction of gamblers will win**; not everyone who gambles – I can bet on that! Winners know when to stop.
21. I wish you a joyful day on December 3, as you celebrate the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**. Remember that you are not disabled, but you have a disability. So, go out and take advantage of economic opportunities at your disposal.
22. Most importantly, please **go and vaccinate** if you have not already done so. I have vaccinated myself, and can assure you that you are safe once you have received your shot in the arm. Please encourage your family member who have not yet vaccinated, to do so as matter of urgency. This is because a new COVID-19 variant, known as Omicron, has been discovered, and experts foresee it to be stronger than the previous ones.

23. And in the meantime, **please continue to put on a mask when in public places; sanitise your hands regularly or wash them thoroughly with soap for 20 seconds; and remember to keep the safe social distance.**
24. Let me further take this opportunity to wish you and loved ones, a **Merry Christmas** – filled with joy, love and peace – and a safe **and prosperous New Year**. As we enjoy and indulge during this festive season, we must strive to lend a helping hand to those less fortunate than us. Christmas is the season of giving; so, let us remember to give!
25. Once more, thank you very much for this opportunity, to address this all-important Event.

I thank you!