



office of the premier

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Lihovisi la Ndvunankhulu

I-Ofisi Lika Ndunakulu

Kantoor van die Premier

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## PREMIER HON. MANDLA NDLOVU'S ADDRESS AT THE PROVINCIAL SCHOOL SAFETY INDABA HELD AT SABIE FLOREAT HOTEL, THABA CHWEU LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, ON 28 MAY 2026

Programme Director, **MEC Masina**;  
Deputy Minister of Basic Education, **Dr Mhaule**;  
MEC for Community Safety, Security and Liaison, Hon. Macie;  
Members of the Executive Council;  
Members of the Provincial Legislature;  
The Chairperson of the Mpumalanga House of Traditional and Khoisan  
Leaders, who is also the President of CONTRALESA, **Kgoši Mokoena**,  
together with all Amakhosi present;  
Religious Leaders;  
Traditional Healers;  
The Executive Mayor of Thaba Chweu Local Municipality, **Cllr  
Nkadimeng**, together with all Executive Mayors and Councillors  
present;  
Representatives of Labour Unions,  
Representatives of School Governing Body Associations;  
Representatives of COSAS;  
The Director-General, **Ms Skosana**;  
Heads of Department and Senior Government Officials;  
Representatives of Civil Society Organisations;  
Members of the South African Police Service (SAPS);  
Community Policing Forums;  
Scholar Transport Association Representatives;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

1. It is an honour to stand before you at this Provincial School Safety Indaba, a gathering dedicated to safeguarding the future of our children. As Mpumalanga Province, we are particularly honoured to host one of our own, the Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Dr Mhaule, among us today.
2. We meet on the eve of Youth Month, during which we will commemorate 50 years since the historic student uprising of 16 June 1976, popularly known as Youth Day.
3. Former President Thabo Mbeki once said: “June 16 reminds us that young people have the power to change the course of history when they stand united behind a just cause.” Today, we call upon young people to stand united against the scourge of violence, bullying and criminality in our schools.
4. The first President of democratic South Africa, following the breakthrough of 1994, Tata Nelson Mandela, once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
5. Immediately after liberation, the democratic government introduced programmes and support systems that enabled

learners, especially those from poor and working-class families, to progress from Grade R up to tertiary education.

6. Many of the political analysts and journalists who are critical of government today benefited from these opportunities. Yet they seldom acknowledge the progress made by democracy. Instead, they focus only on shortcomings while ignoring the many lives transformed through access to education.
7. As we gather here today, we are reminded of Tata Madiba's wisdom that education is the greatest engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, the son of a mineworker can become the head of a mine, and the child of farm workers can become the President of a great nation. What matters is not merely what we are given, but what we make of it.
8. We must therefore ask ourselves: can meaningful teaching and learning truly take place in an environment that is unsafe and plagued by criminality?
9. Distinguished guests and stakeholders who carry the best interests of our children at heart, we are grateful for your presence today. Your attendance demonstrates your commitment to ensuring that our children are educated in safe and supportive environments.

10. We know that a conducive and crime-free environment is essential for effective teaching and learning. Criminal activities in schools must be eradicated.
11. Our children must leave home safely, learn in peace, and return home safely to their families. We trust that this Indaba will produce practical solutions to these challenges.
12. The Constitution of the Republic guarantees respect for human rights. Everyone has the right to be free from all forms of violence and from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Discipline must always be administered with care, fairness and love.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL SAFETY

12. Education is the foundation upon which we build the prosperity of our province. Yet youth unemployment remains one of the greatest developmental challenges facing Mpumalanga, undermining inclusive economic growth, social stability and long-term development outcomes.
13. Despite efforts by government to reduce unemployment, youth unemployment remains unacceptably high and requires focused, coordinated and sustained interventions. South Africa is not merely facing a shortage of jobs, but a serious skills mismatch within the labour market.

14. The youth unemployment rate currently stands at 49.5%, while graduate unemployment among young people is at 29%, and graduate unemployment across all age groups is at 14%.
15. Institutions of higher learning must therefore continuously review and restructure academic curricula to align with the skills demands of modern industries.
16. As government, we are also embarking on programmes aimed at reskilling unemployed graduates to better position them for opportunities in both the public and private sectors.
17. Education cannot flourish where fear and insecurity prevail. A child who worries about bullying, gangsterism or drugs cannot concentrate on learning. A teacher who feels unsafe cannot teach with passion. School safety is therefore not optional; it is essential.

## ACKNOWLEDGING OUR CHALLENGES

17. We must confront the painful reality that many of our schools face serious challenges. How we treat our children will determine whether we build or destroy their future and, ultimately, the future of our society.
  - Violence and gangsterism continue to spill over from communities into schools.
  - Substance abuse threatens the health and future of learners.

- Bullying undermines confidence, dignity and emotional wellbeing.
- The possession of dangerous weapons places lives at risk.

18. It is our collective duty to educate young people about children's rights, including:

- The right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation;
- The right not to be exposed to situations that place their wellbeing, education, physical and mental health, or moral and social development at risk;
- The principle that a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

19. I wish to place before you the school safety statistics from last year. Not to overwhelm or embarrass anyone, but because behind every statistic is a child, a family, a teacher and a community.

20. Last year alone, 623 schools across our province reported incidents of vandalism and burglary. This is not merely a statistic; it is a loud and urgent warning that something within our communities is deeply broken.

21. During the same period, learners were exposed to 25 incidents involving stabbings and gun-related violence. Tragically, two murders were recorded on school premises.

22. Two children left home alive, arrived safely at school, but never returned home alive. The principle that every child must leave home safely and return safely was shattered for those families. No parent should ever have to endure such pain.
23. Drug-related incidents increased from 5 in the first quarter to 72 by the end of the last quarter of 2025. Bullying incidents involving teachers stood at 16, while gender-based violence continued to affect both learners and educators.
24. These are not isolated incidents; they are systemic problems requiring systemic solutions. A child who comes to school terrified cannot learn. A child who grows up surrounded by violence may eventually normalise that violence within the classroom.
25. A child who watches older boys making money through drugs may eventually question the value of sitting behind a school desk when the streets appear to offer quicker rewards.
26. These are uncomfortable truths, but they are our truths, and we owe it to our children to confront them honestly. Yet amid these challenges, there is hope.
27. During the same year, the number of schools implementing anti-bullying programmes increased from 120 to 301. Schools implementing corporal punishment

prevention protocols increased from 50 to 265. Schools conducting searches and seizures nearly doubled. This demonstrates that where there is intervention, there is progress.

28. This tells us that change is possible. We are not starting from nothing. We are building on foundations that are already shifting in the right direction.

29. To the learners present today, I want to speak directly to you as a parent. I know some of you have witnessed things no child should ever witness.

30. Some of you have been bullied or have been afraid to report wrongdoing because you feared the consequences. For some of you, school has not always felt safe.

31. But I also want you to know this: you are not powerless. You are one of the greatest forces for change within your schools. When a learner stands up against bullying, they change the atmosphere of an entire classroom.

32. When a learner refuses to allow a weapon into the school gate, they protect every child inside that school. Reporting danger is not weakness; it is courage.

33. School safety is not the responsibility of government alone. It is a collective responsibility. Parents must guide their children, communities must protect schools, educators must nurture discipline and values, and learners

themselves must take ownership of their environment. Together, we must build a culture of vigilance, accountability and care.

34. As Mpumalanga, the Place of the Rising Sun, we are proud that this initiative aligns with the National School Safety Protocol launched jointly by the Minister of Basic Education and the Minister of Police on 24 June 2025.

35. We will continue strengthening partnerships with the South African Police Service, the Department of Correctional Services, the Human Rights Commission, the Department of Social Development and civil society organisations.

36. Together, we will fight drugs, weapons and all forms of violence in our schools. We will also work with the Banking Association and traffic authorities to ensure that safety extends beyond the classroom into the broader community.

37. No principal, teacher or parent can do this alone. True school safety requires a whole-of-society approach, one that keeps communication open between government departments, schools, law enforcement agencies, parents and community leaders.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND DISCIPLINE

36. We must understand that security measures alone do not create safe schools. We must foster environments rooted in empathy, dignity and respect. Educators must be empowered to manage discipline fairly and constructively while promoting care instead of violence.

## CALL TO ACTION

37. We call on every school in Mpumalanga to establish fully functional safety committees. These structures must not exist merely on paper; they must actively monitor risks, engage learners and work closely with communities. Every school must have a safety plan, every learner must have a voice, and every teacher must have support.

38. We must strictly enforce regulations declaring schools zero-tolerance zones for drugs and dangerous weapons. It cannot be business as usual while unauthorised individuals continue to gain access to school premises.

39. All visitors to schools must be properly screened and processed before entry to ensure they have legitimate business on the premises.

## CLOSING

40. Let us leave this Indaba with renewed commitment and determination. Let us pledge that no child in Mpumalanga will be denied the right to learn in peace and dignity. Together, we can build schools that are safe, nurturing and empowering.

41. Together, we can secure the future of our province. Let the outcomes of this Indaba be guided by honest engagement and practical solutions that will ensure our schools become true centres of excellence.
42. Our expectation is that this Indaba will produce a consolidated Provincial School Safety Framework, accompanied by practical implementation strategies aimed at creating safe, secure and child-friendly learning environments throughout Mpumalanga.
43. We wish this Provincial School Safety Indaba every success and are encouraged to see all relevant stakeholders gathered in one room, united by a commitment to protecting the future of our children.
44. Former President Thabo Mbeki once said: “The youth of 1976 used stones and barricades against repressive forces; today’s youth must use education and skills to fight poverty and unemployment.”
45. Let the outcome of this gathering be the transformation of our schools from mere beautiful buildings into true sanctuaries of growth, discipline and learning, capable of confronting the triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment.

46. Let us leave this Indaba united behind one mission: to make every school in Mpumalanga a place of mutual respect, learning and safety.

47. Together as government, communities, families, educators, law enforcement agencies and learners, let us build schools free from fear. Together, let us restore discipline and hope. Together, let us protect the future of our children.

I thank you.