

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, THE HON MME MAPULA MOKABA-PHUKWANA AT THE DEPARTMENTAL DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY HELD AT RENOSTREHOFF CHURCH ON THE 30TH MAY 2017.

Program Director

In his message for marking the International Disability Day of 2013, which he themed: 'Disability is not Inability'; former General Secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon said:

"First and foremost, companies have found that persons with disabilities make good, dependable employees. They are loyal and more likely to remain on the job. And they are good for morale – many employers report that teamwork improves when disabled workers are on staff. Moreover, consumers are likely to look favourably upon businesses that employ people with disabilities.

He further said:

"Disability is part of the human condition; almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. There are currently more than a billion people with disabilities around the world – that's around 15% of the population of the planet"

The Head of Department, Mme Maisela RJ;

Representative(s) from The Premier's Office, Mr Makgatho;

Representative(s) from the SANAB, Ms Rakumako;

Our guest who is going to share the life experience on breaking the barriers in disability, Mr Stefan Steyn;

Our notable guests; the people living with disabilities;

**Senior Management and the entire Staff of present here;
All Our Stakeholders and Guests from various formations;
Comrades and friends;
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I take pride in addressing this occasion aimed at building awareness about people living with disabilities. And showcasing how it is more than possible to break the barriers that are brought about by disability. Yet I would like to reiterate the point that *'Disability is not Inability'*.

Having witnessed, heard and read, life stories of those who did more even when they were referred to as 'disabled'. We remember people like the late IBhubesi Iase Mgungundlovu (The Lion of The Midlands), our late Comrade Harry Themba Gwala. He continued to lead and contribute to the fight for the freedom of South Africans even upon losing the functionality of both arms to the apartheid notorious interrogation machinery.

That is the story of many giants of the liberation struggle who leaped like a colossus over the toughest conditions of the apartheid regime. They continued fighting the injustices and brutality of the system even when they had little or no ammunition to respond to the cruel attack on the deprived and innocent people of the land.

Programme Director

We again take absolute pride, because this initiative demonstrates that the recognition of people living with disabilities and upholding their rights are considered an everyday matter. This event did not have to happen just on their day and it becomes business as usual the next day.

We have a as a Department committed to supporting these fellow equal human beings by establishing a Disability Forum that engages on and advocates on issues of employees with disabilities. Again as a Department we have met the 2% threshold of employees living with disabilities. We must HoD out-do ourselves as the department and exceed expectations by recruiting more of the disabled during this financial year.

We must continue to emulate our head of state, President, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma. He has set the pace by appointing to his cabinet, members living with disabilities such as Deputy Minister Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, She continue to prove that 'Disability is not Inability' by executing her duties with distinction.

On that note, I would like to reflect on the commitments of the White Paper on the Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities that was published by the Ministry of Social Development on the 9th March 2016. The Deputy Minister Bogopane-Zulu called all of us to commit ourselves towards realising the rights of persons with disabilities by:

- Accelerating implementation of existing legislation that advocates equality for persons with disabilities;
- Taking calculated action to ensure that their rights as equals are upheld;
- Removing discriminatory barriers to access and participation;
- Ensuring that universal design informs access and participation in the planning, budgeting and service delivery value chain of all programmes;
- Recognising the right to self-representation;
- Acknowledging that not all persons with disabilities are alike, and that personal circumstances, gender, age, sexuality, religious and

cultural backgrounds, geographical location, requires different responses; and

- Entrenching the obligations contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in legislation, policy and service delivery.

Equally so, ladies and gentlemen, our law of the land, the Constitution of 1996 emphasise the imperatives of equality by stating:

“Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.”

Programme Director

We strive to live up to these commitments because over and above the initiatives that I have alluded to already. We as a Department support farmers living with disabilities through providing agricultural extension services, infrastructural development and agricultural inputs. As a *‘cherry on top’*; we incentivise them with the hosting of Yearly Awards Ceremonies.

Through this program we recognise their contribution to food security and their participation in the economy of the province from an agricultural perspective. Together with the department they indeed prove that *‘Disability is not Inability’*.

We will keep lifting the bar and stop at nothing but go even beyond the call of duty in serving our people, and prioritising persons with disabilities.

Programme Director

We heed the call of our first democratic President whose passion for valuing and upholding persons with disabilities was vividly expressed when he addressed the conference for the disabled in April 2004 and said:

“It is not a question of patronising philanthropy towards disabled people. They do not need the patronage of the non-disabled. It is not for them to adapt to the dominant and dominating world of the so-called non-disabled. It is for us to adapt our understanding of a common humanity; to learn of the richness of how human life is diverse; to recognise the presence of disability in our human midst as an enrichment of our diversity.”

It would be at the detriment of our efforts for building a non-discriminatory prosperous society not to live by these words.

In tune with President Mandela’s call, let our everyday deeds, small or significant, in public or quietly in our private spaces empower each other fellow compatriots.

Programme Director

In the same vein last year in November, I presided over a ceremony of honouring Farmers living with disabilities. In that ceremony through we showcase that the disabled are doing even greater than the so called ‘unchallenged’ people in life.

In walking the talk, ladies and gentlemen. Recently on the 30th March 2017, I led a program for donating a vegetable garden and other valuable

goods to the learners of Rethusheng Special School in Mamehlabe, Ga-Matlala.

Such occasions, re-affirm that as the Department, we totally believe in the capability of these fellow equals to be enrolled with our Agricultural Colleges in the near future. In one of the days, they will graduate as professional agriculturists of our beloved Limpopo province.

I have since drawn inspiration by the experience of that event and the activities of the learners. As such I have committed to grow that initiative for donating vegetable gardens to the rest of such schools in the province.

Our commitment as the department of Agriculture and Rural Development was further reinforced during the tabling of our 2017/18 budget in the Limpopo Provincial Legislature on the 16th March 2017. The emphasis was to attract the youth, women, and people with disabilities to farming. Your participation, in whatever possible way even if it meant growing vegetable gardens, will go a long way in ensuring food security and healthier organic life style.

We have indicated that as the Department we have ring-fenced funds towards the support and empowerment of farmers living with disabilities, the youth and women in our province.

We have made a clarion call to our people, especially in these strata's mentioned above to make farming fashionable again and take advantage of the assistance that the Department will be able to offer.

We seek to plough a sense of self-sufficiency in our people and especially from a young age and we ought to do all in our power to make it conducive and attractive to them. *Batswadi le setshaba sa Rantsho, setlogeng le di taola, a re ruteng bana ba rena bothlokwa be temo le le ruo.*

Programme Director

Without taking over the role of the vote of thanks on the program, I would like to appreciate all efforts that went into making this event a success. I give special thanks to our speakers and presenters who shared with us their knowledge and life experiences today. You have really empowered us. And equally the HoD and the entire staff of the LDARD, who made this event a success. Your work is highly valued and appreciated and continue to outshine yourselves.

I thank you!