

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT, MRS. H.J MASHAMBA, AT THE
EVENT OF THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL CHILD
PROTECTION WEEK, GA-MASHAU.**

3rd June 2014

Programme Director;

The Executive Mayor of Vhembe District

Municipality, Cllr. Matibe

The Mayor of Makhado Local Municipality, Cllr.

Mutavhatsindi;

Other councilors here present;

His majesty Thovhele Khosi vho-Mashau;

Senior Management of the Department;

Representatives from our sister departments,

SASSA, SAPS and the National Development

Agency;

Comrades and Colleagues;

All protocol observed.

The late former President of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela once said, and I quote:

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul, than the way in which it treats its children”

Therefore, when we hear of the brutal killing of four young children in Limpopo, within a week, we have to ask ourselves: what is wrong with society today?

Programme Director

Our Constitution has the highest regard for the rights of children and for the equality and dignity of every person regardless of gender, race, mental or physical ability.

Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is not only a basic value, but also an obligation clearly set out in Article 28 of the South African Constitution.

What do we mean, when we talk about child protection? Child protection is to ensure the safety; well-being; care and protection of children through an integrated multi-disciplinary approach. Despite the best efforts of Government and civil society to protect children from child abuse, neglect and exploitation, many children still remain vulnerable.

Reducing the high levels of violence against children is among South Africa's most overwhelming tasks - along with providing care and support to millions of orphaned and vulnerable children.

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa specifically states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. Regardless of this constitutional right, every day thousands of children around the country are still victims of - or witnesses to - physical, sexual and emotional violence.

With all of this in mind, the Child Protection Week Campaign saw the light 1997. Henceforth, it has been commemorated in South Africa annually and aims to mobilise all sectors of society and communities, in an effort to ensure care and protection for children.

The main aim is to raise awareness of the rights of children as articulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005).

Even though there is legislation to protect children from all kinds of abuse; to ensure their rights to social services; to establish a separate criminal justice system for children in conflict with the law and to combat human trafficking, this does not change the way people think and act.

Programme Director

South Africa's long history of socio-politically motivated violence has also given way to a high occurrence of criminal violence.

Children tend to be more vulnerable to this violence, because they have less capacity than adult to protect themselves.

Child abuse, neglect and exploitation occur across all socio-economic levels, but around the world poverty has been found to be an important cause.

Unemployment and poverty affect children both directly and indirectly. It can cause family stress and frustration which, in turn, can result in violent behaviour towards children as well as abuse and neglect.

As I alluded to earlier, the murder of children is also prevalent in our country. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Bulletin, released in August, says the rate of child homicide in the country is more than double the global average!

Programme Director

The question then remains what is to be done to urgently reverse this situation? The protection of children is not up to one specific department or entity, but needs a coordinated and integrated approach by all government departments and civil society organisations. The emphasis is on prevention and early intervention.

Some of the services that government has introduced in the protection of children are: Child Protection Week; the Child Protection Register; Early Childhood Development; the South African Child Protection Surveillance Study Project; Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes; the Child Labour Programme of Action; Thuthuzela Centres and other places of safety and many more.

These programmes are specially geared towards empowering people - especially children – with knowledge that will assist in eradicating the scourge of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. It is also aimed at protecting and promoting children’s rights in partnership with civil society and to encourage communities to take ownership in the care, safety and protection of their children. Knowledge is power and children need to know their rights within society, when no-one else is there to protect them.

Programme Director

To our precious learners gathered here today and to all other stakeholders present: We implore you to be vigilant; report abuse or neglect of children in your communities. You as children have the right to quality education; safety; quality care and nutrition.

Nobody has the right to physically or emotionally attack you in any way. Government has put in place many systems to assist you to live a full life without fear or pain and to grow to your fullest potential.

We implore the adult members of this community and especially the leaders of various structures to be vigilant and report any abuse, neglect, exploitation or degradation of children. Through your cooperation in National Child Protection Week we have learned valuable lessons about the social welfare of children in this community. You have indicated that you know of cases of abuse. Let us expose this scourge and start to heal our communities.

In closure, let us work together to turn awareness into change of behavior, so that every child in Limpopo is able to enjoy the rights the Constitution entitles them to.

Mayihlome!

Khanimambo!

Ke a leboga!

Baie dankie!

Ndi a livhuwa!

Thank you very much!