

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT, MRS. H.J MASHAMBA, AT THE
EVENT OF THE DEPARTMENTAL CASUAL DAY
CELEBRATION, REAKGONA ADULT CENTRE.**

5th September 2014

Programme Director;

The HOD, Ms. Daisy Mafubelu;

**Our partners from Epilepsy South Africa, Autism
South Africa and Deaf South Africa;**

Senior Management and Staff;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Comrades and Friends;

All protocol observed.

Let me begin by saying it is wonderful to see everyone gathering together here today; supporting our differentially gifted brothers and sisters. Yes, when we talk about persons with physical disability, we are actually referring to people who have talents, abilities, tenacity and strength just like everyone else! We therefore refer to them as differentially gifted.

Colleagues and Friends

We have been celebrating Casual Day since 1995, when the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa thought it befitting to celebrate such a day to fundraise and create awareness.

Indeed prior to this date, the rights of persons with disabilities were not truly on the forefront and the birth of our democracy in 1994 brought with it a deeper understanding for people who have, in the past, been overlooked by an uncaring and unjust system.

Through the way in which we dress up differently on Casual Day, we show that we are all just the same, regardless of ability or so-called disability. The Day is also an opportunity for us to take stock of the achievements we have made in our 20 years of democracy, towards the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as challenges we still face.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognizes and guarantees the right of People with Disabilities, to be treated equally and to enjoy the same rights as all citizens.

The Constitution further lists grounds upon which people may not be discriminated against.

In the same year of 1995, Government adopted the White Paper on Transformation of the Public Service, which outlined government's commitment to achieve a minimum of 2% representation of persons with disabilities in the public service by the year 2005.

However, as at December 2005, people with disabilities constituted a mere 0.16% of public service personnel. Consequently in 2005, cabinet reviewed and maintained the minimum 2% employment equity target for persons with disabilities within the public service, to be achieved by March 2010.

On the 25th November 2008, cabinet approved the Job Access Strategic Framework on the Recruitment, Employment and Retention of persons with disabilities in the public service, as well as the implementation thereof.

The vision of the strategic framework is to create a transformed public service that is free of discrimination, inequalities and barriers to self-reliance. In short, government wants to create an environment where persons with disabilities can enjoy their rights and privileges as equal citizens. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned targets have not yet been achieved so far and the target has been re-set to 31st March 2015.

Colleagues and Comrades

The Department is therefore constitutionally obliged to work towards the mainstreaming and integration of programmes aimed at creating a better life for persons with disabilities. Legislation alone, however, will not ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy their human rights. We therefore applaud initiatives such as Departmental Disability Day, which serves to create awareness with regards to employees with disability.

The Department, today, joins the world in recognizing and embracing this day as a special day of recognition, awareness, tolerance and understanding. In fact, as a Department that deals with the welfare of the most vulnerable members of society, we should be seen to be taking a lead in this regard.

As a Department, we are proud to say that, in our integrated disability services to the community, we have conducted a Disability Mainstreaming Toolkit Workshop in collaboration with the National Department of Social Development, during the first quarter of the financial year, in which forty five (45) delegates were in attendance. We are also currently providing funding to non-profit organisations, as partners of the Department, to strengthen our service delivery initiatives along this line. During the current financial year, sixty six (66) NPO's dealing with persons with disabilities have been funded, including: stimulation centres for children with disabilities; protective workshops for adults with disabilities; homes for persons with disabilities. Also, two thousand seven hundred and fifty four (2754) persons with disabilities were reached through advocacy, life and development skills rendered by NPO's.

Programme Director

We are proud of the fact that the Department is fully complying with legal framework, policies, strategic framework, mandates, directives and prescripts related to disability management. Disability Forums of Employees with Disabilities have been established and currently, thirty four (34) employees with disabilities make up our staff complement of three thousand three hundred and ninety five (3395). This means that the Department is at 1% as of 31st July 2014.

While we are proud of all of our achievements and while it is true that we have evolved in our mindset with regards to persons with disabilities, it is important to note that we should continue to fight the stigma attached to our differentially gifted brothers and sisters, which still exists in our communities.

We should continue being seen to take the lead in advancing their rights, so that even the private sector and society at large, can begin to realize the importance of following our trends of equal employment. The more we create awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities, the more society will have to realize that equal treatment also means physical accessibility for all people and unconditional acceptance. We so often overlook situations in everyday life where, for instance, someone in a wheelchair cannot access a building or a certain floor in a building, or where goods in shops are placed in such a way that they cannot access it. Too many times, colleagues and comrades, we observe people parking their vehicles in parking areas reserved for people with disabilities. We should address this when we come across this thoughtless behavior!

In closure: As the champions of the rights of persons with disabilities, we will continue to forge strategic partnerships with various role-players in society and we urge organisations of people with disabilities, professionals and business entities, to work with us to ensure equality and justice for all.

Today, let us just enjoy the day; take hands; acknowledge one another's differences and challenges and accept everyone for who they are.

Together we can build a caring society!

I thank you!

Mayihlome!

Khanimambo!

Ke a leboga!

Ndo livhuwa!

Baie dankie!