

SPEECH BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING A SNAP DEBATE ON YOUTH DAY AT THE MPUMALANGA LEGISLATURE CHAMBER IN RIVERSIDE, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Friday, 04 June 2010

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, we are often accused of hiding behind our past, by those whose fore-fathers never had an interest of the black child at heart. Let me remind them that the notorious 1953 Bantu Education system was established purely because the self-imposed rulers of the time, believed black learners were not intelligent enough to contribute meaningfully to the economic growth of the country. They vowed that black learners were not to receive an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they wouldn't be allowed to hold in the country of their birth. This view was supported by the amount of money the regime was spending in its pretence to educate a black child. It is recorded that in 1975, the regime was spending R644 per annum on educating a white child, but only R42 on a black child.

Who amongst the previously oppressed, can therefore forget where we come from as a black nation? Our biggest mistake in their eyes, is for taking a trip down the memory lane to remember and acknowledge the contribution made by the youth of 1976. These young minds, some of whom perished from the barrel of the oppressor, have played a significant role towards our struggle for liberation, hence we believe we owe our freedom to them.

How dare therefore, they complain that we never want to let the past remain in the past? Our message to them is, history will never be erased. Even if you could try to erase it from the history books, it will remain permanently engraved in our hearts.

The 1976 Soweto students uprisings was a turning point for South Africa's notorious education system, and we will never apologise to anyone, for continuing to pay homage to all the youth who fought against the barbaric education system – system that was meant to degrade the black nation right in their country of birth.

Honourable Members, it is not that we do not want to move from the past, but it is because we continue to cherish the contribution made by all those learners, who died for demanding a better and all inclusive education system. This they did, because of their commitment to realise the pledge we made on 26 June 1955 in Kliptown, when we said *“All shall enjoy equal human rights”* – including all children receiving the same quality of education. Through the *Freedom Charter*, we the then oppressed people of South Africa, committed to ensure that *“the doors of learning and culture shall be opened”* to all.

We committed to fight relentlessly, to realise our dream of equal opportunities to all South Africans, both black and white. We vowed that *“Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit.”*

Through their selfless fighting, the oppressor was proved wrong for believing that black people of South African origin, could never be equal with Europeans. It is through the shed blood of Hector Peterson and hundreds others, that all children can today attend a school of their choice, and share a desk with the great-grand children of those who never believed in their capability. They endured the brutality of the oppressor, for challenging their immaturity and stupidity for believing that black learners were supposed to receive inferior education, designed to provide them with skills enough only to serve their white masters. How dare they now want us to forget where we come from?

They applied the strategy of divide and rule by separating the black nation according to their languages, and relegated us to the so-called homelands, but were never successful. They had hoped that by implementing the Bantu Education system, we will eventually give up, and accept that we are less human beings than them, but that too, did not work. Their devious and inhumane efforts actually made the youth of yesterday, to be more determined to fight relentlessly for change.

We cannot therefore, forget their contribution, and will forever refer to the past, to acknowledge their invaluable contribution. Though we have forgiven all those who previously caused the black nation hardships, how could they therefore want us to easily forget our struggle for equality and emancipation? How could they be so myopic to even want to judge us – and even want to dictate to us, how we must conduct our lives?

They will never succeed in their attempt to erase our history of the liberation struggle outside the classroom. The Soweto schools uprisings of 1976 continues to be part of our liberation struggle, hence we will forever pay tribute to the young lions, who lost their lives fighting for equal education opportunities.

Honourable Members, however yet another struggle to empower our youth economically still continues. Our government continues to implement empowerment policies, which will ensure that the youth share in the wealth of their country. This is a commitment we made when we adopted the *Freedom Charter*, and we will never renege on. Our province remains youthful, with 65% of the total population being the youth up to the age of 30 years. We therefore owe it to them to ensure that they receive the necessary skills, which will enable them to contribute meaningfully towards growing the provincial economy. We believe it is our responsibility to ensure that we create a skill base required by the economy. We owe it to our people, to leave a lasting legacy when we are gone.

As we celebrate Youth Day on June 16 this year, we must remember the youth who lost their lives for believing in a just cause. We must however also mobilise the youth who are leaders of tomorrow, to play a critical role in ensuring that our communities are free of crime. As they were brave to confront the enemy back then, they must use their bravery now to attack our current enemy, in the form of crime.

We believe we continue to deliver on our promises, but acknowledge that much still needs to be done.

As I close, our liberation stalwart, *iSithwalandwe*, Madiba – one of the founding members of the ANC Youth League, once said, *“After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”*

Working together we can do more to ensure youth beneficiation from the available economic opportunities.

I wish the Youth of this province a fruitful Youth Day on June 16.

Nkosi sikelel'intja yethu!

Morena Boloka basha ba rona!

Hosi katekisa Afrika!

God Bless our Youth!

I thank you!