

## **ADDRESS BY PREMIER TSP MAKWETLA AT THE DISABILITY AWARENESS RALLY 31 March KaMaqhekeza Stadium. Nkomazi**

Programme Director, Honourable MEC Siphosezwe Masango  
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature and the Executive Council  
Executive Mayor Councillor Jerry Ngomane  
Mayor Councillor Selby Khumalo  
Commissioner Madikwe Tom Manthatha from the South African Human Rights Commission  
Ubukhosi  
Representatives from the Organisations of Disabled Persons  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel very honoured to have been invited to speak at this disability awareness rally and to be part of a dynamic movement that is rapidly mainstreaming disability into the broader society. It is my fervent conviction that this gathering will contribute immensely in locating disability at the centre of government development programmes.

Today's gathering is an illustration of Government's commitment in meeting its Constitutional obligation towards people with disabilities. Over the past decade we have succeeded in creating a conducive environment for the implementation of projects and programmes will restore the dignity of people with disabilities.

Indeed over the past decade we have worked hard to ensure that we improve the lives of all our people. Today South Africa has a caring government, with housing programmes for the poor, with social security grants for pensioners, young children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. We have also gone a long way in putting in place programmes to redistribute land. More people can today access quality education and improved health services.

More households are connected to clean water and electricity and more people have access to telecommunications. We also have laws to deal with the cancer of racism and democracy and equality before the law are entrenched in our constitution. Women, workers, youth, professionals, people with disabilities, traditional leaders, religious communities, business people and rural communities, all have the right to utilise opportunities that have come with a decade of freedom.

Programme Director, all this means that we were able to reach and improve the lives of more people confronted by the scourge of poverty. This progress with regard to poverty alleviation was consistent with the undertaking we made that the fight against poverty would take centre stage in the sustained advance to create a better life for all.

We did all these things and more because we were, and still are, aware that the poor, marginalized and displaced carry the greatest burden created by poverty and under-development. They are the first to suffer at the hands of issues such as preventable and treatable disease and the threat of death. Women, children, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities are amongst those most vulnerable to ill health, which is exacerbated by poverty.

Indeed we have gone a long way in creating a better life for all our people. But we must acknowledge that a sizeable number of our people are still without shelter. Many still go to bed hungry and many dread the approaching cold season because they have no clothes, no food and no place they can call their own. Among these we count women, children, the youth and people with disabilities.

### **Challenges faced by people with disabilities**

People with disabilities are still faced with massive challenges. Challenges which includes discrimination and marginalisation from accessing employment opportunities, education, housing, public transportation and many more public facilities.

Recent reports indicate that employment levels of people with disabilities in the province are lower than the desired demographic benchmark. While some progress has been made with regard to reasonable accommodation, more work still needs to be done.

Some sections of society continues to view people with disabilities as objects of pity and poverty. They consider people with disabilities as mere recipients of handouts and charity. Disability does not represent inability. People with disabilities are an asset and a massive human resource which we all have to tap from in order to build a sustainable and stable economy.

I believe that most people from the disability rights movement will agree with me that when you focus on a person's ability you will definitely make sure that the person receives all the support that he/she requires. But if you focus on the individual's inabilities you will always be filled with words such as "shame", "pity", "he cannot do this, she cannot do that". Remember that this totally limits creativity hence the high levels of discrimination we are seeing today.

You must remember that the Integrated National Disability Strategy by Government acknowledges that injustices against people with disabilities continue unabated. There are high levels of discrepancies in our systems to effect rigorous transformation that is responsive, acceptable and inclusive of our people with disabilities. This has been Government's response in contributing to the creation of a better life for persons with disabilities.

As government we will continue to honour our commitment to the Integrated National Disability Strategy by providing specialized services such as grants, shelters and employment for people with disabilities. Access for people with disabilities remains high on our list of priorities.

We will continue to ensure that government offices and hospitals are made more accessible to people with disabilities. Our aim is to ensure that accessibility to all our institutions; especially schools and health institutions are addressed on an ongoing basis.

Programme Director, we are happy that the Executive Council of our province has recently adopted an audit on disability which will form the basis for our intervention in the year 2005 to 2009. This adoption constitutes the basis for our contribution to a broader development and transformation agenda aimed at the improvement of the quality of life of our persons with disabilities.

All these things demonstrates our level of commitment in improving the quality of life for human kind.

Our agenda is deliberate and a concrete one, and therefore, we will do all in our powers to increase the number of people with disabilities employed by the Provincial Government in line with the Employment Equity Act.

We understand all challenges associated with the employment of people with disabilities, it is for these reasons that we will step up our efforts to meet this commitment.

Programme Director allow me to indicate that this becomes a targeted programme of Government and therefore it will mean targeted resources where necessary through various ways.

We are pleased that we are starting to find solutions to our challenges. Challenges such as illiteracy, poverty, inadequate access to formal education system by 70% of children with disabilities of school going age, the empowerment of organizations of persons with disabilities, inaccessible public facilities including communication for our deaf and blind brothers and sisters and other essential areas. It is within this context that we are happy to that our Government programme of action attempts to address all these host of challenges.

We are a province on course and in progress addressing the basic needs of our people in particular our people with disabilities.

Programme Director, there are a number of disturbing reports we receive regarding the abuse of people with disabilities. Let me warn those who continue to abuse people with disabilities in particular women and children that we will not tolerate it. We will definitely ensure that justice is done through our various structures of Governance such as our courts, the South African Human Rights Commission and others.

There are also reports that some individuals are using the cause of the disabled to enrich themselves. They ostensibly claim grants and support from government for non-existent organisations using people with disabilities for their dirty deeds.

We are watching you.

I therefore call upon all of us to work together, in unity and create a conducive environment for people with disabilities in order for them to be totally liberated.

Programme Director, in conclusion, we pledge our continuous support to the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities. We continue to support at an International level the process of establishing and developing a Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which we believe will ultimately ensure uniformity and that people with disabilities across the globe are treated with dignity and respect.

We have to get the Private Sector on board. Disability issues are not just Government issues alone but rather the active involvement of the Private Sector is essential. We would like to see the Private sector taking more and more responsibility in the creation of jobs, and performing other social responsibility and others.

On behalf of the Executive Council I wish to thank you all for your attendance and for blessing this occasion.

Your participation contributes immensely in building a better place for all of us!

Yes, I agree that disability rights are human rights, that people with disabilities have rights too and that all of us are equal and therefore shall be treated with respect.

**I thank you all.**