

REMARKS BY PREMIER TSP MAKWETLA AT THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL DISABILITY ACHIEVERS' AWARDS

Middelburg, Wednesday 30 November 2005

Programme Director

The Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality Cnr SPD Skhosana

The Mayor of SteveTshwete Municipality Cnr Mantlakeng Mahlangu

Our Private Sector Partners

Leaders of the disability sector in the province

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you very much for affording me the privilege to address this important function where we honour those who challenged and overcame adversity. To honour those who through their actions once again sent a message that disability doesn't equal inability. We salute them because they have proven beyond any doubts that they are determined to, and capable of making a difference in their lives and that of others.

Today's function comes a few days before the International Day of Disabled Persons on Saturday. The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

This year's theme: "Rights of people with disability: Action in Development" focuses on the interdependence between human rights, development and disability. It focuses on getting action to involve persons with disabilities in the development process, acknowledging that there can be no development unless everyone is included. By denying persons with disabilities their human rights, we prevent them from actively partaking in the development process and in sharing the benefits.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to be upfront and admit that our Constitution is amongst the best in the world in that it recognises the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human race as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. We are proud that eleven years into our democracy we have - at both provincial and national level - managed to put in place mechanisms for the empowerment and upliftment of persons with disabilities. Indeed since we came into power disability has been at the centre of our agenda for development and social transformation.

Today we watch, almost with disbelief, how people with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities and participate in governance and administration in our country. As government we have put in place appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to integrate persons with disabilities into all mainstream societal endeavours, both within and outside the home environment.

Our government recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work. In fact as government we have set an example through employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector. Today persons with disabilities have effective access to general, technical and vocational guidance programmes and training. The tools are also there to promote opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

As government we also recognise the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, housing and access to clean water, among others. We also recognise the right of persons with disabilities to social protection. We have guaranteed persons with disabilities their political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others. On the first of March next year, people with disabilities will exercise their right and opportunity to vote and be elected on an equal basis with others, as they have done over the past eleven years, into structures of local government.

Programme Director, a lot still has to be done to raise the level of awareness of the human rights of disabled persons. We need to acknowledge that some citizens who are disabled, still live in conditions of poverty, hunger and starvation. They are also vulnerable to abuse and disease, illiteracy, and many other social ills associated with under-development.

As government we are concerned about these difficult conditions disabled persons put up with in some cases.

Although we have, in the past eleven years, made progress to address these issues within the human rights framework, continuous action at all levels of society is needed to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy full and equal participation. We must work hard to ensure that by 2014 we have made huge strides in ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal access to jobs, education, health, information and other services.

That is why as government we need to develop, maintain and strengthen our partnerships with organised civil society, organisations of disabled persons and the private sector. It is for these reasons that we want to acknowledge the role of the private sector partners in making the Mpumalanga Province a better place for all of us. The private sector has a huge role and an obligation towards persons with disabilities too. And this sector can fulfil such a role without necessarily taking over the responsibility from persons with disabilities or from Government. We want to see the private sector moving more and more to the centre in assuming specific responsibilities.

It is those in our communities who are vulnerable to the abuses of the advantaged, who can judge better how humane we are as a society, because our vulgarities are in their face every day.

Programme Director, today is not a time for speeches. We are gathered here to give our special recognition and praise to those of our people who remain fully dedicated to their work and who persistently seek creative and innovative ways to meet the challenges facing them and their fellow brothers and sisters on a daily basis.

It is with a great sense of pride that we present to the people of Mpumalanga the teams and individuals whose creativity and commitment have contributed towards making our province a better place. Those who will be receiving awards today epitomise the kind of public servants our country needs to achieve our reconstruction and development objectives. We look forward to the day when the judges will be totally embarrassed to select the winners, as all the entrants would be deserving nothing less than the trophy itself.

I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to all the teams and individuals that have been nominated for the awards. All of you, including those that did not make it to the final round, make the Mpumalanga Provincial Government proud with the efforts that you put into your work everyday. Keep up the good work.

I thank you.