

**Keynote address by the Honourable Deputy Minister, Mr Mosibudi Mangena, MP during the Iekgotla on 'Sexual Harassment in Learning sites' held in Bloemfontein on 16 August 2002.**

Honoured guests, representatives of Educator formations, ladies and gentlemen.

South Africa's birth of democracy and her entry into the global village brought about new changes that signalled hope and development for the lives of all her citizens. It placed certain demands on her, mainly to ensure and guarantee their safety from what has plagued them all along, the denial of their birth given rights, their dignity, their basic human rights of equality and freedom amongst others, these had to be reinstated.

Program Director, it did not end there, with democracy the Government as the custodian of the law, came up with frameworks and machinery at both national and provincial level to advance gender equality and equity, and protection for the vulnerable and marginalised groups. Into the global village, 1995, South Africa ratified UN and SADC Conventions and Declarations such as the Beijing Platform of Action, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Declaration on no Violence against Women and Children.

August month is called the woman's month - why? -to remind us of their contribution towards the achievement of human rights. Oral and written history mentions that they refused to be treated unequally, in an undignified manner, less than men and women of other colour. Somebody once said a black woman suffers from triple oppression by - the white man, white woman and the black man. Now I have been told that in learning sites it has increased because the male educators and learners perpetuate those sufferings. Ladies and gentlemen, this is not supposed to be the case, I have to challenge both parents, learners,

students and educators to join hands in healing the female educator and girl-child and those with disabilities.

During the Dakar 2000 World Education Forum, the Government committed itself to the Education For All [EFA] goal of eliminating gender disparities by 2005 and gender equality by 2015. This commitment means ending all forms of gender discrimination, including sex-based and gender-based violence. It is unacceptable to have learning sites turned into unsafe zones for our girl-child, female educator and those with disabilities because of the sexual harassment and abuse they face in the execution of their duties. Women are special because of their qualities. Our strife towards the achievement of gender equality and equity includes celebrating the fact that we are different, it is what makes life interesting. Men and women are equal but different.

This biological difference does not imply an offence and therefore punishment but appreciation therefore valuing them. Femininity should at no stage be equated to weakness or disability as others who are "mentally weak" or "uneducated" perceive it but femininity is embedded in strength, courage and wisdom. Can anyone imagine life in learning sites without the presence of female educator the girl-child and those with disabilities? Surely the kind of education and learning taking place there will be unbalanced and I believe no one of us would like to live with those type of persons.

Today the Department takes cognisance of and pays tribute to women educators who continue to "stand in the gap", pay the price to make sure that educators and learners are equal beneficiaries of democratic values. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me therefore to speak of this "unnecessary evil" - that is - the wrong socialisation process of oppressing and abusing women, and girls often transmitted through culture, religion and other discriminatory laws. It is unnecessary because the

Constitution of this country nullified it, yet it continues to bring so much suffering, for example, gender based violence and oppressive customary and religious laws. I repeat it is unnecessary as the following sections of chapter 2 of Act 108 of 1996 declared its victory:

Section 15 - gives women the right to practice own religion, belief and opinion. Female educators and the girl-child have the right to form own opinions and beliefs without fear of censure or punishment in learning sites.

Section 16 clearly prohibits that individual freedom of speech should not be of the opinion that spreads war, incites violence or creates hatred based on race, gender, ethnicity or religion. To the perpetrators enough is enough, stop gender-based violence in learning sites. Let us all heal the girl-child and the female educator.

It is unacceptable in schools to have people thinking it is their right to ridicule women or girls about their bodies or clothes, tease, bully and make sexual advances towards them. This is definitely not the freedom of speech our Constitution promotes.

It is wrong to think that you are more masculine or 'real' man if you sexually propose a girl/female educator, or that you validate your masculinity through violent behaviour towards them. Real men don't do gender violence, sexual harassment or rape. It is a shame that the media reports should reflect on rape cases happening in the schools' yards, offices or even classrooms. The learning sites should be free from gender-based violence hence the "Safe Schools campaign".

On 27 May 2002, my Department together with educator and student formations agreed on the need to work together in combating all forms of gender based violence directed at both learners and educators in learning sites. The Department wants to ensure that the teaching-

learning process does not militate against the development of one or both genders, persons with disability and other previously marginalised groups. Our business is to equip the boy and girl child, and the learner with disability with the needed knowledge, skills and assertiveness to make the most of their abilities to lead healthier lives and protected against discrimination and violence.

To accomplish our Departmental vision, the tears being shed and sorrow experienced by some learners and female educators in our learning sites has to be replaced by joy and laughter. Together, through Tirisano - working together in partnership with all the educators' unions, student organisations, school management teams and school governing bodies we shall accomplish this.

Program Director, it is our obligation to ensure that these values, enshrined in our Constitution are effective, not just good on paper but never applicable in the lives of girls, women and those with disabilities.

In conclusion, the Department not only salute all South African heroines but we specially pay tribute to those in learning sites who stood up against all forms of violence directed at them, and learners. To all those who blew the whistle, at their own expense/taking the risk that goes with it, when the boys and girls were harassed, molested, denied their basic human rights and stripped off their self dignity. You are the mothers of this nation and we need you to continue doing the good work you started. To the perpetrators of sexual harassment: reach out to all the hands of compassion extended to you, help is readily available if you open up to someone or call a toll free number

From this day onward we are determined to put women at the heart of Africa's reconstruction, to respect their human rights and restore their dignity.