

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY PROF. HLENGIWE MKHIZE DURING THE LAUNCH OF DISABILITY RIGHTS AWARENESS MONTH 2020 03 NOVEMBER 2020**

THEME:

“Together Building Communities Inclusive of Disability Rights”

Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Maite Nkoana Mashabane, in absentia

Programme Director, Director-General of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Advocate Mikateko Joyce Maluleke

Acting Chief Director, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Mr Benny Palime

Representative from DPISA

Representative from Presidential Working Group on Disability, Mr Nkosinathi Ndhlovu

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour and privilege to give a keynote address as we launch the Disability Rights Awareness Month 2020. Our theme is: “Together Building Communities Inclusive of Disability Rights” it’s a further commitment that our communities cannot continue to exclude and marginalise persons with disabilities. Failure to create a society for all, will ultimately be undermining our own legislation and policies which have been developed since the dawn of democracy in 1994 under the motto nothing about us without us.

A year ago we launched Disability Rights Awareness Month 2019. It was the first time launching this campaign under the new expanded mandate of the department. Since then we have engaged with the sector at every opportunity and we have been held to account when transformation in the sector has slowed to unacceptable levels.

In 2013, the Cabinet approved 03 Nov – 03 Dec as Disability Rights Awareness Month, and 03 December as the National Day of Persons with Disabilities. Disability is one of the seven focus areas identified by the South African Human Rights Commission to promote, protect, and monitor the realisation of Human Rights thereof in South Africa. South African Human Rights Commission notes a very critical fact that persons with disabilities currently account for 5.1% of the population aged 5 years and older in South Africa with disabilities, who continue to experience lack of access to adequate health and basic education, and are at risk of economy with no prospect of securing employment. The sector is also particularly vulnerable to the compounded effects of discrimination and abuse.

This is attributed to the entrenched negative beliefs and attitudes about the causes of disability; about the capabilities of persons with disabilities; and about the need to protect persons with disabilities through segregated programmes; and persons with disabilities are in the main unable to take up/access affirmative action opportunities or access public services provided for the general population.

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) works closely with a number of membership-based organisations, often referred to as Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) that are run and managed by persons with disabilities. These organisations constitute the representative voice of persons with disabilities and are based on the respective membership demographics.

They support the development of persons with disabilities' capacities by providing them with a common platform to exchange and share their experiences and provide information on disability for their members on existing services, facilitate and provide such services.

Advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities is an ongoing reality which requires all of us; government, public and private stakeholders as well as communities; to work together in ensuring that the Constitution, Legislation, White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, African Union Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was signed early 2020, amongst other historical achievements on the rights of persons with disabilities, do not go unnoticed and appreciated. As a country we have come a

long way in ensuring the human rights of all citizens are upheld, protected and promoted.

But our role goes beyond advocating for change, it requires us to regulate to ensure that persons with disabilities are at the centre of government's programme of economic recovery and reconstruction as contributors and beneficiaries. On a practical level, it means that, amongst other tasks, persons with disabilities must be involved in conceptualising, developing, implementing and monitoring economic development policies and programmes.

President Ramaphosa made it clear when he established this Ministry in 2019, that he expects the Ministry to also influence government's delivery machinery to ensure that we change the lives of women, youth and persons with disabilities in a meaningful way. This therefore requires that our monitoring and evaluation system is able to demonstrate impact.

The inclusion of disability in the 2019-2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework, which constitutes the National Programme of Action for the current Administration, is a turning point in particular for persons with disabilities, as it is the first time that our interests and aspirations are reflected in the Programme of Action at such a strategic level.

It however carries with it a tremendous responsibility to champion and monitor effective implementation, a responsibility which the Department does not take lightly. It also demands that we re-energise the partnership between government and organs of civil society to drive our transformation and disability inclusion agenda with more urgency and impact.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, different sectors have been affected in different ways. The COVID-19 pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities.

In April 2020, the Department included disability mainstreaming in National State of Disaster Regulations to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in all emergency interventions. We also participated in developing directions for sector-specific directions. We robustly engaged national departments to advocate for the rights of

persons with disabilities, in addition to making Sign Language Interpreters for the media briefing of the National Corona Virus Command Council.

The department has worked with development partners and kind sponsors namely UNFPA, Proctor and Gamble to name a few, to bring relief to persons with disabilities during this difficult period of the COVID-19 lockdown. The lockdown has cut off supplies to care centres, support facilities, old age homes and similar organisations relying on the kindness of strangers for donations to support persons with disabilities. Many of these organisations which rely on donations have been forced to let go of support staff or close their doors due to risk of infection from COVID-19. To mitigate against this, the department has secured and donated food hampers and sanitary packs to care centres and DPOs across the country. We visited the Tswelopele Frail Care Centre in Hillbrow and Forest Farm Centre in Bryanston and distributed care packages which included food items, treats for children, hand sanitisers, soaps and face masks to centres caring for persons with disabilities.

The department also secured donations of sanitary products which counted women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities amongst the beneficiaries. The consignment consisted of over 22 192 sanitary towels, 7926 nappies, and washing powder packs were distributed between Gauteng, Kwa Zulu Natal and Eastern Cape Provinces .

On Friday, 22 May, The department hosted a webinar on Persons with Disabilities and COVID-19 South Africa. The two and half hour webinar took centre stage on the day and hosted 169 participants who joined the conversation to discuss and engage the department on this very important topic. COVID-19 and Persons with Disabilities in South Africa.

Deputy Minister of Small Business Development Ms Rosemary Capa also addressed guests on economic interventions structured for persons with disabilities affected by the lockdown regulations.

On 9 June the department handed over hygiene products to Blind SA and Disabled Children's Action Group – Two organisations working in the disability sector, in a bid to further cushion the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The goods were handed over to the organisations after they were received by the Department from Procter & Gamble South Africa on 29 May 2020.

On 30 August we hosted a webinar with a panel of women with disabilities representing various organisations, to engage under the theme: “Gender Equality and realizing the rights of women with disabilities for an inclusive future”

The Department has also supported the Department of Health in distributing PPEs to provinces, focussing mainly on DPOs.

The Disability Rights COVID-19 tracker was developed to gauge the impact of government’s interventions for persons with disabilities. The Department has advocated for flagship projects and best practice models at a District level to accelerate access to services on the ground. The greatest challenge we face is that institutions are still under-reporting on their performance due to their limitations in disaggregating disability data.

The Department has supported the workstreams of the Presidential Working Group on Disability in order to accelerate performance in areas such as self-representation, universal design and access, inclusive education, accessible communications, access to health and such.

The Department has partnered with the UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights to conduct research of the experiences of persons with disabilities during COVID-19 pandemic with the view of strengthening emergency response systems in the short to medium term.

Together with PanSALB we also launched the Sign Language Charter in September 2020. The charter was informed by the challenges observed by the SASL National Language Board that relate to communication, access to information, facilities, social justice by the Deaf including the type of service provided by SASL interpreters in general.

The 2020 Disability Rights Awareness Month’s main focus will be on communicating the disability inclusion commitments of the Sixth Administration, as contained in the Medium Term Strategic Framework. We host this Disability Rights Awareness Month programme with an aim to build communities that are inclusive of disability rights, and will provide an outcome on issues that need the intervention of respective Government Departments.

Let us please take note of the Main and Sub-Themes that will guide our monthly activities accordingly:

**MAIN THEME**

“Together Building Communities Inclusive of Disability Rights”

## Sub-Themes

Week 1 (03 - 07 Nov)

Accelerating inclusive learning environments for persons with disabilities at all levels

Week 2 (08 - 14 Nov)

Rebuilding responsive disaster management strategies that places persons with disabilities at the centre

Week 3 (15 - 21 Nov)

Rebuilding an economy accessible to all persons with disabilities

Week 4 (22 Nov – 28 Nov)

Creating an accessible justice system that seek to address the risk of compounded marginalisation and assisted decision-making legal framework

Week 5 (29 Nov – 03 Dec)

Launch of 365 Disability Rights Awareness Campaign and outlining department's plans in promoting National Priorities

Government, in line with the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, has been assisting under-represented groups such as persons with albinism, young people with dyslexia, Deafblind persons, persons with psychosocial disabilities and lately persons of short stature, to strengthen their collective voice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The disability sector engages with government through the following consultative platforms:

- 1) Executive/Strategic Level: Presidential Working Group on Disability (PWGD), which consists of 45 sector representatives, inclusive of representatives from the majority of DPOs nationally, a few DPOs at local level (geographical/impairment) representation; as well as individual experts with disabilities/parents of children with disabilities.
- 2) National Disability Rights Machinery, which brings together all national departments, provinces, SALGA, Chapter 9 institutions and the sector. Similar structures exist in 8 of 9 provinces (Western Cape has none)
- 3) Municipal Disability Fora in many municipalities provide a platform at local level.

On the programme for the 3rd of December 2020, international day of persons with disabilities, the Department will host our State President, His Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, to address the nation on the 3rd of December 2020, and deliver your message of support and celebration of achievements by persons with disabilities.

The Disability Rights Awareness Month (DRAM2020) programme will focus on the main and sub-themes related to the rights of persons with disabilities; economic justice and empowerment; we will look at mental health with the focus on the impact that COVID-19 has had on our learners with disabilities, especially learners with intellectual disabilities; and assess the state of readiness in providing services for women and persons with disabilities in context of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

As in social rights, economic rights can be accorded to all persons with disabilities applying the social model and mainstreaming approach. On a practical level, it means that, amongst other tasks, persons with disabilities must be involved in conceptualising, developing, implementing and monitoring economic development policies and programmes. Also they must be considered when programmes and projects are planned (as beneficiaries and implementers) and that all barriers to access to the mainstream economy must be eliminated.

When looking at the economic transformation and job creation of persons with disabilities, the status quo is that there is very little movement on improving the employment status of persons with disabilities since Employment Equity Act was passed in 1999. The Department prides itself to see government supporting business enterprises that are run and managed by persons with disabilities and during this Disability Rights Awareness Month, we will visit two of the national sheltered factories that are in Johannesburg, who manufacture furniture and textiles.

Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of discrimination in accessing healthcare and life-saving procedures during the COVID19 outbreak. In some countries, health care rationing decisions, including triage protocols (e.g. intensive care beds, ventilators), are not being based on an individual prognosis, but rather on

discriminatory criteria, such as age or assumptions about quality or value of life based on disability. Moreover, access to healthcare, rehabilitation and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities, including with respect to accessibility and affordability, can also be curtailed due to the increased pressure on healthcare systems.

Women with disabilities are often seen by their societies as weak, worthless and, in some cases, sub-human, and such perceptions heighten their risk of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The situation is exacerbated by other factors like gender, race and class, as all these work together to create vulnerability to GBV. Research shows that disability reduces opportunities for education, work, training and employment, particularly for women in disadvantaged communities, magnifying their vulnerability to violence.

Women with Disabilities have also been found to be more psychologically vulnerable than non-disabled women, and they are twice as likely to be victims of sexual abuse, rape and intimate partner violence (IPV) than their non-disabled counterparts.

Women with disabilities and children with disabilities are at a higher risk of being victims of gender-based violence in South Africa.

It is for this reason that the two last weeks of Disability Rights Awareness Month, which coincide with 16 Days Campaign of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, are very important for us embrace and take very seriously as we continue to raise awareness on Gender-Based Violence against women and girls, especially women with disabilities because they are not immune to domestic violence.

We call on every South African Citizen with and without disabilities, private and public sector, government departments and local municipalities, to hold hands with the Department to ensure that together, we continue to build communities inclusive of disability rights.

As the Department championing the disability rights agenda, we need everyone's support to ensure that the Disability Rights Awareness Month key messages are

widely communicated and that activities planned by Rights of Persons with Disabilities Branch, are broadly shared and events covered in the media.

The Department would like to assure the disabled community in South Africa that we as government, will continue to advocate for their human rights. The struggle for the realisation of the right to equality and dignity for persons with disabilities in South Africa is not a neglected struggle. We are in this together.

We call on every South African Citizen with and without disabilities, private and public sector, government departments and local municipalities, to hold hands with the Department to ensure that together, we continue to build communities inclusive of disability rights.

Thank you.

**Issued by GCIS on behalf of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities**

**03 November 2020**