

SPEECH BY LIMPOPO MEC FOR EDUCATION ISHMAEL KGETJEPE AT THE BEFA 2ND CONFERENCE, TZANEEN, 01 JULY 2017.

Programme director

Leadership of BEFA

All your stakeholders and delegates

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentleman

Good day,

Allow me to express my sincere delight to be here today. I would like to thank the leadership of Basic Education For All for having deemed it important to extend an invitation to me to be part of today's proceedings. We are indeed humbled and refreshed by your sense of humility and passion in our quest to ensure that quality basic education is achieved through collective efforts. I must indicate from the outset that we acknowledge and appreciate BEFA's foresight and enthusiasm for the promotion of quality basic education in public schools. It demonstrates in many ways than one, that you understand the role of education in the knowledge economy and that it is one of the tools that can provide the much needed answers. I hope that we shall be able to share ideas and things that we urgently need to consider to expand access to quality education, especially for children from the previously disadvantaged communities and children from poor households across the province.

The Youth month has just ended yesterday but the work that we have to do to educate the youth has no beginning and ending. The struggle continues and we have to continuously engage with you and other stakeholders, to create, as captured in your theme, a sustainable future for education in Limpopo. This conference gives hope that together we are at the forefront of our education system and it is these collective efforts that will make education take huge leaps forward ensuring that more children learn in a better environment.

This well-chosen theme brings to mind the words of an American Politician who served as the 35th President of the United States of America from January 1961 until his assassination in November 1963, becoming the youngest President to die. His name is John Fitzgerald Kennedy. On what we should think of education, Kennedy said at the time: **“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream, which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greatest strength for our nation”**

As you ponder whether to agree or disagree with JFK, let me indicate that we are compelled by a variety of local, continental and international conventions, to make access to quality educational opportunities widely accessible to all South Africans. These include the Constitution, NDP, UNESCO, Continental Education Strategy and our Action Plan 2019. All these, provide a clear direction to improve access, redress, equity, efficiency, inclusivity and quality.

We are gathered here because we believe in the power of education, notwithstanding the stark realities and challenges we

face as people and as a sector. We know that in education there are no bystanders because all of us are vital cogs that must turn the system into the one that ensures access to quality teaching and learning in our schools. Needless to say, investing in education is the best investment we have been making since the dawn of democracy, and contributions from CBOs, NGOs, civil society, private sector and individuals are always invaluable not only to us as government, but also to the learners themselves. That why we believe that your inputs will contribute to an improved delivery of quality education environment.

By harnessing the power of working together, we can revolutionize how teaching and learning takes place. It is in this regard that we recognize that if we are to progress as an education system, we need to decide how we will use various forms of support to improve the provision of quality education at all schools.

You are already taking a lead in prioritizing critical issues of education such as to strengthen and support teaching and learning, school governance and governing bodies, school funding, infrastructure, textbook delivery, the importance monitoring and sexual violence. Indeed quality education depends on conducive classrooms, good furniture, clean toilets, clean water, scholar transport, food for learners, libraries, science laboratories, safety of learners, good governance and support. The battle will be fierce but we must ensure that all these things are prioritized for us to achieve our strategic goal of an improved delivery of quality education.

Let me indicate that when I joined the Department, amongst other things, I was concerned about school funding in terms of the

Norms and Standards. I was also concerned that there has never been a budget for the development of teachers and monitoring of schools was very poor. Our schools were not receiving 100% allocation in terms of the Norms and Standards for school funding. As we speak, schools are now fully funded and we made sure that in the last financial year, we set aside an amount of 11million for teacher development. We have done the same this year because our teachers deserve to be the best at what they do. To improve monitoring of schools, we will be advertising 739 subject advisors posts in this financial year.

What we must emphasize to schools and stakeholders with regard to the Norms and Standards allocation is the importance of accountability because we are not going to tolerate impropriety and the misuse of these scarce resources. We want issues of curriculum delivery, administering of internal examinations, servicing of municipal accounts and maintenance of school infrastructure to be undertaken with this money. We have trained principals on financial management and we expect good financial management. SGB members serving in School Finance Committees were also trained and it is in this regard that we will not tolerate cases of financial mismanagement. As we move to the 2018 SGB Elections, we urge our communities to elect people of substance, people who will promote good governance in our schools and people who will take their assigned responsibilities seriously.

Our infrastructure backlogs are known and we have never hidden them because we know that we are a country with an undesirable historical past. We cannot sweep under the carpet inequalities of the past and we have to foster relations to address them. Some of

these backlogs are as a result of natural disasters while others are due to vandalism during protests. Others are as a result of projects that were put on hold. We need to work together to discourage acts of vandalism and destruction of properties wherever and whenever they happen.

What is worrying and concerning to us as a sector is that, we are more often than not used as bargaining chips by those aggrieved communities. These protests, as you have come to realize, have nothing to do with education. Let us protect what we already have in order to deal with what we need for our schools.

I must indicate that in the three years running, the Department has not surrendered any money meant to reduce inappropriate school structures. We are continuing to build new schools and maintaining existing ones. We have commenced with the repair of 10 schools in Vuwani and attending to 58 out of 120 storm damaged schools throughout the province.

Equally important is the provision of basic services to schools such as water, sanitation and electricity. There are backlogs in this area of our infrastructure work to schools. Two weeks ago, I met with one of the implementing agencies, The Mvula Trust, to impress on them the speed with which we must move to complete the water and sanitation projects. Hygiene must be in the centre of teaching and learning in all our schools and that is why we have committed in this financial year, to provide water to 210 schools, 185 schools to be supplied with sanitation facilities. Our awareness of these backlogs made us to extend an invitation to the private sector to come on board in trying to reduce some of these backlogs that have a potential of standing in the way of proper teaching and learning.

We keep on knocking on doors of donors until they open to assist us in this regard. We appreciate and thank those companies and individuals who have so far come on board to build schools, laboratories and libraries.

Early in the year, we expressed our regrets to school communities following the late delivery of stationery packs to learners. We have since adopted a 10 Point Plan to ensure that challenges we have experienced in January does not happen again. The plan will see us concluding delivery of LTSM to schools by end of October this year so that we hit the ground running on the first day of school in January 2018.

At this stage, we have passed the ordering of textbooks by schools and we are at the stage where the ordered LTSM is being delivered to our identified warehouses. Schools that have not made their orders will be the first ones to say textbooks in the form of top-ups have not been delivered. We urge our schools to respect the placing of orders deadlines. We also urge you and your stakeholders to work with us in enforcing the retrieval of books and this is a matter our schools must take very seriously. We will in this financial year, provide 369 with school furniture adding to the work we did last financial year.

Our schools are supposed to be safe places where all learners have equal access to equal educational opportunities and are treated equally. It is in this regard that we welcome the judgment handed down in the South Gauteng High Court this past Wednesday, that public schools cannot promote one religion to the exclusion of others. Our Constitution and the South African Schools Act clearly state that no one religion should be promoted above another and the observance should be conducted on an

equitable basis. We must remain school communities that guarantee the right of all persons to conduct religious observations and we must be united in our diversities.

Sexual violence and harassment of female learners is a serious problem in many of our schools. It is a matter that needs all of us to deal with. It must start at home with parents teaching children respect for fellow learners, male learners respecting at all times female learners who are victims in this case. Our educators on the other hand must assume the role of parents at schools charged with the responsibility of protecting female learners against sexual harassment and violence. We must encourage learners to report educators who sexually abuse, assault and harass learners they are supposed to be teaching.

We must indicate that we have made great strides in that we have expanded access to free education for children from poor households. We feed over 1,6 million learners and the number of schools benefiting from scholar transport has increased from 255 to 373 benefiting over 34 000 learners across the province. We are proud of the fact that we are making gradual, but steady progress in areas such as financial management, performance in maths and science, performance of learners in rural areas and the fact that Limpopo is represented by more learners when the Minister announces the National results.

There is more that needs to be done and we must allow space for reflection. This means among other things, discussing things that really matter for good education and to improve what we do. While we may not always agree, we continue to be united in our desire to do better and achieve more for every single child in our schools.

At all times, we want Limpopo to be a force for improvement in education and for us to be a force to be reckoned with, we must work together and never lose sight of our core activities, which is providing fair, valid, credible and reliable inputs and contributions towards the delivery of education. That means seeking your views, accommodating your views, the views of parents, educators, communities and everyone in order to secure the future of this nation. We must ensure that the totality of our work leaves an impact and leads to real, tangible improvement. To us, education remains a societal issue.

Let me conclude by leaving you with the wise words of John F. Kennedy when he said: **“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource”**

We wish you well as you elect the new leadership tomorrow.

Together we move South Africa Forward!

I thank you for your attention.