



PUBLIC PROTECTOR
SOUTH AFRICA

Address by Public Protector Adv. Busisiwe Mkhwebane during the Nelson Mandela International Day event at Mkhophuli Secondary School in Kwaggafontein, Mpumalanga on Wednesday, July 18. 2018

**Programme Director and Representative of the Public Protector in Mpumalanga, Mr. Botromia Sithole;
Mayor of Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, Cllr. N Mtsweni;
Inkosi Mahlangu;
CEO of the Public Protector SA, Mr. Vussy Mahlangu;
Representatives of SASSA, NYDA & the Provincial Department of Education;
Ladies and gentlemen**

Good morning,

I bring you warm greetings from the Public Protector South Africa team on this chilly Nelson Mandela International Day, a day inspired by the deeds of the late former South African President, Tata Madiba.

As you may be aware, this day was declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009 and has since been celebrated annually on President Mandela's birthday, July 18.

This year's celebration is special in that it coincides with what would have been President Mandela's 100th birthday. We therefore join the world in remembering this icon and keeping his legacy alive.

Around early July 2017 as my office and I were readying ourselves to do our bit for humanity as part of that year's Nelson Mandela International Day, I learned about the sorry state in which this school was said to be in.

The details were carried in a news report, which had been brought to my attention by a staff member. It appeared, from the article in question, that its author had interacted with the school community, from learners to the principal.

In their apparent interaction with the author, some of the learners recounted their experiences studying here, including how it was difficult for them to perform to their full potential, given the school's lack of educational infrastructure.

They lamented the physical conditions of the school premises, including dilapidated buildings, and questioned why authorities had seemingly poured resources into refurbishing other schools in the area while neglecting theirs.

At the time, plans for our Nelson Mandela International Day, which calls on people of the world to come together and set aside as little as 67 minutes of their time to do good for charity in emulation of President Mandela, who himself dedicated 67 years of his lifetime to humanitarian work, were already at an advanced stage.

We were going to spend the day at an orphanage in Stinkwater outside Pretoria and the people there had already been informed and were eagerly waiting for us to arrive. Accordingly, we could not lend a helping hand to the school.

However, the plight of learners here remained at the back of my mind throughout and I vowed then that this year I would do something - however little - about it to positively impact the lives and futures of this year's and future crop of learners.

Though there are many other schools across the country that face similar challenges or worse, I was more concerned about this particular school. Let me be categorically clear. As Public Protector, I want all learners in our country to take their lessons in better schools that are equipped with the best infrastructure money can buy and I should not be seen to be favouring any school over others.

Therefore, the reason my heart was with this particular school was not because I care less about other schools. As you may be aware, I have an emotional attachment to Mkhephuli Secondary for it was this very school that moulded me into the person I have become today.

It was this school that prepared the younger version of me for the road ahead and made sure that when I walked out of those gates in 1988, I was equipped with all the knowledge that I needed to pursue a career in law and ultimately play my part in ensuring that there is justice, particularly for the people at grassroots just as I am doing today as Public Protector.

Accordingly, when the opportunity arose for my office to find a beneficiary for its humanitarian work as part of this year's Nelson Mandela International Day, I was resolute that it would undoubtedly be Mkhephuli Secondary School. I immediately put a team together to start interactions with the school, with a view to establishing how deep the problems here ran.

The report I got from the team was depressing. I was informed that the walls were crying for a coat or two of paint. Classrooms needed electrification. The staff room did not have cupboards or, at the very least, shelves and that, as such, files and papers were lying all over the floor.

I was further informed that the school had a few classrooms that were not in use due to the low learner roll. It was the wish of the school community that one of those unused classrooms be turned into a library but there were no book shelves. Thieves were rampantly looting the little resources that the school had.

As if that was not enough, the team reported to me that the school's surroundings were an eyesore, with litter all over and overgrown grass. In that state, it was clear to me that despite the efforts of learners and teachers alike, little, if at all, impactful teaching and learning was taking place here. The environment was just not conducive.

Concerned, sad and disappointed, I asked the team to request from the principal, Mr. Nkambule, a list of the school's needs. His wishlist confirmed the team's observations. He indicated that the school needed science equipment, computers, ablution facilities, cupboards, chairs, teaching aids with projectors, electrification, a multi-purpose hall and refurbishments to the premises.

Realising my office would fall short of meeting the school's needs, I resolved to call upon fellow alumnus, stakeholders and Good Samaritans to join hands with us in turning the situation around. This was informed by our simple belief that, like their counterparts elsewhere, the learners here deserved the best opportunities too.

Like President Mandela, I believe that education is a potent tool that people can use to secure a better future for themselves. I am of the view that ensuring an environment and surroundings that are conducive to impactful learning will go a long way to help free the potential of learners here and better their lives.

My office partnered with Ikwewezi FM and through the station our message to those with the means to help was disseminated. We also approached a number of potential sponsors. I'm pleased to announce that our impassioned plea to fellow products of the school, stakeholders and cheerful givers did not fall on deaf ears.

Businesses such as McCormick Properties and Travel With Flair pledged R50 000 and R10 000 respectively. Another company, Nutech, pledged a laptop and projector to the combined value of R10 000. In addition, alumnus such as Ms. Johanna Mthimunye, Ms. Fanifani Mahlangu and Ms. Sibongile Ngobeni also came forward and pledged more funds and supplies towards this intervention. The funds from McCormick Properties have been set aside for the installation of shelves in the staff room and in the library. Those from TWF have been put towards the acquisition of vegetable garden implements and seedlings and transportation of volunteers.

In addition, stakeholders such as the provincial Department of Social Development and the National Youth Development Agency have vowed to provide needy learners with school uniforms and sanitary pads respectively. Others such as the Departments of Education and Public Works have been invited to come see for themselves the dire state of affairs here so that they can intervene.

And that is essentially what has brought us here today. We came ready to roll up our sleeves and work. In a short while, and with as little disruption to teaching and learning as possible, we will be installing shelves in the staffroom and the library, we will be cutting grass, we will be cleaning and doing the garden. We will also handover brand new equipment such as a laptop, projector, projector screen and stand.

But we can only do so much. In the end it will be up to the school community to ensure that this little community works to its advantage. We know that this community is terrorized by criminals. It will be up to you to guard the equipment jealously. It will be up to you to maintain the garden and augment the school nutrition programme with your own fresh produce.

I also want to address the issue of cleanliness around the school premises. I was very disappointed with the school about the filth. People only take you seriously if you take yourself as such. The Department of Education does not have the resources to hire a cleaning company for schools. We come from a culture where learners cleaned up after themselves.

If there are pieces of paper everywhere and dust all over the classrooms, learners should tidy up. They should wash the windows and keep these recently-painted walls clean. Like we do in our own homes, let us keep our surroundings here spotless.

As I conclude, let me thank all those who responded positively to our call for help, including McCormick Properties, Nutech, Travel With Flair, my fellow alumnus Ms. Johanna Mthimunye, Ms. Fanifani Mahlangu and Ms. Sibongile Ngobeni, NYDA, Social Development and the many Good Samaritans that gave towards this good cause. Without you not of this could have been possible.

Before I get off the platform, Mr Programme Director, I would be making a major mistake if I do not acknowledge the role played by a woman in helping keep the Mandela name alive when Tata was imprisoned. This name is celebrated all over the world today not only because of Tata's contribution but also because there was Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela who kept the home fires burning while Tata was in prison.

She had to raise the kids alone and continue to wage the struggle while bearing the brunt of a brutal system that showed no mercy. The role that Mama Winnie played is acknowledged by Tata himself in some of the letters that he wrote to her from behind prison walls. As we give Tata the due honour, let us also remember that without the support he got from Mama Winnie and many others, he would not have gone as far as he has went.

From me and my team, which works hard to help me investigate, report on and remedy alleged and suspected improper conduct in all state affairs, in the public administration and in all spheres of government, we are truly grateful for your gesture of Ubuntu. Continue to give with the belief that "blessed is the hand that gives".

Thank you.

Adv. Busisiwe Mkhwebane
Public Protector of South Africa