ADDRESS BY PROF HLENGIWE MKHIZE:

DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, AT THE NATIONAL LAUNCH OF DISABILITY RIGHTS AWARENESS MONTH 2019

Date : 03 November 2019
Venue : Tshedimosetso House (GCIS), City of Tshwane
Programme Directors

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

Ministers and Deputy Ministers present here today

Chapter Nine Institutions present here today

Acting Director General, Ms Shoki Tshabalala

Leaders of our Inter-Faith Community

Leaders of organisations of and for persons with disabilities

Members of the Presidential Working Group on Disability

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen
Disability Rights Awareness Month 2019 is the first opportunity that the Sixth Administration as a collective, has to engage South Africa on the rights of persons with disabilities as equal citizens.

We yesterday had an opportunity to spend the day in conversation with leaders of the disability sector from different parts of the country, to unpack the causal factors of the barriers they experience, and to agree on a few priorities for the national disability rights agenda.

I have to commend the sector for the spirit in which this engagement took place. Their willingness to work with the Sixth Administration in ensuring that we change the lives of persons with disabilities in a meaningful way, is appreciated.

Their commitment to mobilise civil society, in particular in our rural communities, to ensure that we achieve our shared goal of a disability inclusive South Africa, give us hope that the task is doable. This will be extremely important in the roll out of the new District Development Model, as it will enable communities to tap into the talents and expertise of persons with disabilities for the greater good of the entire community. Everyone benefits when we target those furthest left behind.
I was encouraged to see that the sector priorities and government’s seven national priorities find alignment. I was also particularly inspired by their commitment to leave no-one behind, and that the sector welcomes the emergence of under-represented voices such as those from persons with dyslexia and short statured persons.

We agreed that more needs to be done in strengthening inter-generational dialogue and work, targeting in particular the 18-25 year age group.

I also briefly met with the chairperson of the National Albinism Task Force, formed during the recent visit of the United Nations Independent Expert on Albinism, and to hear that the Task Force has begun its work in developing a 5 year National Action Plan on Albinism in partnership with government.

We took note of the sector's appreciation that their voices matter, and that there are high expectations now that the disability coordination function has been relocated back to The Presidency.

But let me not pre-empt the sector's input today. As agreed during our engagement, they will provide more feedback on the outcome of our engagement.
As The Ministry in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities we are the overall champions in driving the transformative national agenda that will create a South Africa which is truly inclusive of the rights of persons with disabilities in every possible way.

Our national disability policy, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provides us with a detailed road map to achieve this. We are honoured to have many of the disability rights activists who assisted to develop the policy directives contained in the Policy, here with us today.

It is my intention that we build on this partnership, and that we strengthen our machineries through which we structure coordination, collaboration and partnership, over the next five years. The Policy provides clear directives for calculated action to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities as equal persons are upheld.

The cornerstone of the Policy - removing barriers to access and participation that will economically and socially liberate persons with disabilities - have been embedded in the government’s programme of action over the next five years, as elaborated upon by Minister Nkoane-Mashabane earlier.
I would like to assure South Africa that, as a member of the Executive tasked with this important responsibility, I take my responsibility very seriously.

We will over the next few months see a change of pace, a change in the level of responsibility expected from every public servant and how this should be displayed in ensuring that we deliver services to all South Africans, including those with disabilities. The *Khawuleza* train is moving, No one should be left behind, and therefore we call on South Africans from all walks of life to get on board.

Persons with disabilities and their organisations have for too long fought the battle for social inclusion, equality and equity, alone. Their human rights struggle is everyone’s struggle. Their liberation is dependent on society’s contribution in removing the barriers which keep them isolated and marginalised.

We need the participation of our traditional leaders, our religious leaders, our cultural leaders, women’s organisations, youth formations and civic leaders to work with us in building a South Africa that respects and uphold the rights of persons with disabilities.
The theme for this year’s Disability Rights Awareness Month speaks to our intention to build a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it - Black, White, men, women, with or without disabilities. That is the South Africa we fought for. That is the South Africa we must build together.

That is the South Africa we all want. And that is the South Africa persons with disabilities want.

Disability Rights Awareness Month will focus on mobilising local action for local change. We need to ensure that every person with a disability, regardless of where they live, regardless of what their impairment is, regardless of their race, gender, age or socio-economic status, can feel the change happening in their lives as we break down barriers which marginalise and isolate them.

I am encouraged by the many activities that will be taking place during the month in our rural communities in particular. Let us ensure that we rally behind these initiatives through our presence and contributions.

The weekly themes were therefore conceptualised with this in mind.
During this coming week, we will be focusing on local action which ensures that children and young people with disabilities are empowered to chart their own destiny through access to quality lifelong learning.

We are calling on MECs and HODs of Education, Health and Social Development to ensure that no child is left behind when the schools re-open in January 2020.

Let us ensure that action is taken now to ensure that every child of school-going age is enrolled in a formal education programme come January 2020; that every child has an assistive device that will provide them with mobility and communication; that scholar transport will be available for children unable to get to school by themselves; and that every child, regardless of their environment, have full access to their learning materials and the learning process.

We are calling on TVET College principals, school principals and SGB chairpersons, working with communities, to ensure that no child or young person with a disability is turned away, that our learners and educators have been engaged in diversity awareness, and that no child is subjected to bullying by either educators or fellow learners.
We similarly call on our universities to build on the work done to date by working harder in removing physical, communication and attitude barriers which marginalise students with disabilities.

We call on our communities to support families who have children with disabilities – reach out, embrace and support these families. Make their struggles your struggle. Make our African proverb of “It takes a village to raise a child” inclusive of children with disabilities.

**Week Two**

From 10-16 November, our focus will be on a built environment accessible to all persons with disabilities. Too many of us take freedom of mobility in our cities and towns for granted, not realising that these same environments often contribute to the isolation persons with disabilities are subjected to, hindering them from being able to get to school, to work, to their place of worship, to community meetings or sportsfields.

We therefore call on built environment professionals and universities training these professionals, the Council for the Built Environment, the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications, the national and
provincial Departments of Public Works as well as municipalities to strengthen consequence management mechanisms when the law is broken as we build, and to ensure that our professionals in the built environment space is universal design literate and confident.

We need to do more to retrofit buildings, transport systems and open spaces to make them accessible and safe for everyone, including persons with disabilities, to use.

**Week Three**

Ultimately what every South African seek is to live with dignity, being economically independent, being able to look after him or herself and his or her family, being able to contribute to the economic growth of our beautiful country, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. The focus for Week 3, from 17-23 November, is therefore on **Persons with Disabilities as Equal Players in Building Inclusive Economies.**

We call on employers, the corporate sector, those responsible for procurement in both the public and private sector, to become disability confident, to ensure that persons with disabilities are active participants in
the economy, and that they benefit from a minimum of 7% of any employment and economic opportunities on offer.

Employees with disabilities is an asset, not a liability; employment of persons with disabilities makes business sense; procurement from service providers owned by persons with disabilities makes business sense; investing in reasonable accommodation support increases productivity and occupational health and safety.

**Week Four**

South Africa is a country scarred by violence, with many persons with disabilities at the apex of compounded vulnerability. Coinciding with the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, the focus for Week 4 from 24 November to 3 December will therefore be on *Children and Women with Disabilities – feeling and being safe as equal citizens in their communities.*

The disability sector during our engagement yesterday shared valuable insights into the compounded risk and vulnerability persons with
disabilities experience and the additional difficulties in accessing justice when their rights are violated. They also shared some valuable insights on possible solutions to reduce risk and strengthen access.

Our Call to Action for this week is to magistrates, court managers, police station commanders to ensure that persons with disabilities, regardless of their impairment, have equitable access to your services by putting in place and making known what reasonable accommodation support is available.

We are also calling on our communities to take action and to protect vulnerable children and women with disabilities by standing up for them; by being vigilant; and by supporting them in reporting abuse.

We furthermore call on in particular on principals and boarding facility heads at special schools to strengthen measures to protect the children in your care; to report abuse; and to ensure that perpetrators face the consequences.

We reiterate our call to our traditional leaders, our religious leaders, our councillors, some who are with us this morning - we need you to be our ears, eyes and hands on the ground. We task you with ensuring that we
leave no child, young person, adult or older person with disability in your community behind.

We also call on our journalists to be conscious of what you write, how you write it, how you portray and profile persons with disabilities in the media. You are thought shapers. Influencers of society, Let us use the power of your pen, your voice and your lens to educate South Africa, to mobilise South Africa to action.

Sharpen your pencil, empower your keyboard by providing platforms to persons with disabilities to represent themselves in the stories written about them.

Let us therefore, as we focus South Africa’s attention on persons with disabilities as equal members of South African society this month, be reminded that when we act, we do not act on behalf of persons with disabilities, but that we act in solidarity with them, by giving life to their motto of **Nothing About Us Without Us.**

I THANK YOU.