

SPEECH BY THE MAYOR JOSEPHINE DIKELEDI MMETLE DURING THE DISABILITY INDABA AT IVORY TASK LODGE ON 08 JUNE 2012

Councilors present here today

Members of our Community

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guest

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to address you today, in a forum that seeks to address the challenges faced by people living with disabilities. People with physical impairment continue to be seen as obstacles by their own communities. They are seen as obstacles to productivity by business and as a burden to their own families and friends. I'm here to tell you that as government we do not see you in that way, I am here to assure you that government has prioritized your needs, government has put your issues at the top of its agenda.

The formation in 2009 of the ministry of Women, Children & People with Disabilities is sign of government's commitment to ensuring that proper attention is given to this special group.

There is a proclamation in the Freedom charter that South Africa belongs to all of us, the constitution reiterates this sentiment by

guaranteeing equality to all South Africans. Our government seeks to create a non-sexist, non-discriminatory, inclusive society that protects and develops human potential of its children.

Programme Director

We are gathered here today to launch the Disability Council, As we launch today, we wish to make a firm statement that the continued discrimination and denigration of people with disabilities has no place in a free and democratic society such as ours.

Our call as per the theme for Disability, namely 'Working together to build a better South Africa for all: Persons with disabilities as equal participants in sustainable development', must go beyond slogans and translate into action.

Our gathering here today indeed reaffirms our commitment and relentless struggle for the creation of a society that respects and upholds the right of people with disabilities to equal access to opportunities and participation in community life.

On this special occasion, let it be known and understood that facilitating access to opportunities for people with disabilities and promoting their rights, is not an act of charity nor a humanitarian gesture. It is a constitutional responsibility and an economic imperative.

We need to pay focused attention to the challenges of access to opportunities and services. The majority of people with disabilities can live independent and productive lives, particularly if they have access to resources, accessible environment and information, as well as assistive devices that allow them independence, dignity, self-sufficiency and responsibility.

Programme Director

Although government has put legislation, policy and programmes to champion the rights of people living with disabilities, there are still obstacles. We need to fight the stereotypical and discriminatory beliefs that our people have towards people living with disability. We need to address environments that are hostile towards people living with disabilities, all building must be accessible to people with disabilities, whether it is hotels, government offices, malls and shopping centers. We must utilize communication systems that are inclusive of our people with disability.

Programme Director

As we launch the Disability Council today, throughout the year, we must spread the message that the absence of accessibility or the denial of access is the loss of opportunities to participate in community life on an equal basis with others.

From today until 2014, we must collectively raise our voices and work together to ensure and give practical impetus to:

- *Reasonable accommodation in the workplace, including accessibility of the built environment, access to personal assistance and assistive devices;*
- *Access to buildings where government services are being provided, including educational institutions, housing, medical facilities, emergency services, work places;*
- *Access to public transport;*
- *Access to Information and communications, including electronic services, Braille and Signage;*
- *Access to assistive devices;*
- *Access to social security.*

We call on our social partners in the private sector to support us by consciously and vigorously identifying and addressing areas of discrimination and inaccessibility that continue to contribute to the high unemployment rates among our disabled population.

Programme Director

We furthermore call on our partners in the media to actively address negative terminology and language that continue to stereotype people with disabilities as dependent, helpless and

objects of charity. We call on you to promote positive images and to highlight good practice that addresses discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion.

We must collectively commit to a more sustained public awareness campaign which will unfold alongside concrete measures by the public and private sectors in partnership with the disability sector and civil society to respond to the challenges of access faced by people with disabilities.

Programme Director

I want to appeal to all our residents to resist from parking in areas designated for people with physical impairments. You insisting on parking in those reserved areas is undermining the rights this special group. I also call on all people who must park on these designated parking bays to get the necessary permits and stickers in order to ensure that our law enforcement officers deal accordingly with this those who disrespect your rights.

Programme Director

I am hopeful that this forum will provide a platform for deliberations with an objective of finding ways of engagement between government and its partners in ensuring that the agenda of people living with disabilities is prioritized. We want to find consensus on approach to be employed in dealing with these

issues. I urge all delegates to approach these issues with caution and to respect other people's views in your deliberations. Let us leave here with implementable programmes that can be subjected to evaluation.

Together we can do more

I thank you