

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR M.N MOKOENA, MPL, DURING A SNAP DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AT THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE IN RIVERSIDE, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Tuesday, 13 March 2012

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members;

We all agree that March 21 every year opens up the already healed wounds, given the merciless beatings and murdering of our people – who were mauled down, despite them being unarmed. Their biggest sin was to fight for their human rights – they wanted to be treated equally like others. They wanted justice to prevail. However in the eyes of the rulers of the time, a black person was not equal to them.

As we commemorate *Human Rights Day* this year, let us do so by paying homage to the most vulnerable members of our society, that is, **women, children, farm workers and people with disabilities**. This is because their rights as human beings continue to be trampled on despite them being guaranteed by our country's progressive Constitution.

The *Bill of Rights*, in our country's Constitution – which is a cornerstone of South Africa's democracy, enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of **human dignity, equality and freedom**. Chapter 2 section 10 guarantees **human dignity**, stating that "*Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.*"

Despite these guarantees, our mothers – women continue to be ill-treated in our communities. They are abused by the very same men who are supposed to protect them.

This is a serious anti-Constitution behaviour which should never be tolerated and should be uprooted at all costs. Women have played a significant role in fighting for the restoration of our human rights, and thus their rights should be equally protected.

The plight of farm workers continues to haunt us despite the *Bill of Rights* guaranteeing them a right to fair labour practices and protection against slavery and servitude. They endure inhuman long working hours under the scorching sun making money for their employers, who in most cases, trample on their human rights.

Child labour, despite it being outlawed, continues to be rampant. These future generations continue to endure ill-treatment from both ends of the stick. They are sometimes abused by their own parents, family members and the community at large, and on the other hand, they are forced into child-labour.

This situation can never be left unchallenged – we collectively have a Constitutional mandate to protect and safeguard the human rights of these vulnerable members of our society.

Honourable Members;

Our Constitution guarantees a **right to health care, food, water and social security** to everyone.

Our main challenge therefore, is to deal effectively with what I've termed the inseparable triplets, that is, **unemployment, poverty and inequality**. Without addressing these infamous triplets, women, children and farm workers will never truly enjoy their human rights. They continue to be the most unemployed; affected much by poverty and endure inequality.

Working together, we can do more to restore the dignity and protect the human rights of women, children and farm workers.

I thank you!