

NAPTOSA STATEMENT ON YOUTH DAY 2019

June 16 is a day of remembrance – of pupils, Hector Pieterse, Hastings Ndlovu and others killed on that fateful day in Soweto in 1976.

In celebrating Youth Day, we should not only remember the past but also reflect on the present and the future of the South African youth.

Let's be honest, this Youth Month must be one of the worst for a very long time. School violence has dominated the news. We are only two weeks into the month and there has already been 7 reported incidents of fatal stabbings and shootings and a violent robbery.

Long gone are the days of the odd school brawl. Learners now have to contend with extreme forms of violence involving guns, knives and the like in what was once a safe haven - the school environment.

To school under a constant, and real, threat of violence, gangsterism and death must severely and negatively impact the psyche of our youth. And once they leave the school premises, much of the same awaits them in the broader society.

Whilst the present looks bleak, the future of our youth could be even bleaker if the powers that be continue their current inaction around this phenomenon. Conferences, summits and workshops to discuss the problem are all good and well and NAPTOSA has participated, and will continue to participate, in such fora. Unfortunately, once silence falls after such events, the unions are not in position to implement measures to address and combat the problem. There has to be political will and concrete action from the side

of government, led by the DBE. To NAPTOSA's mind this is sadly lacking. We therefore call on our political leaders and administrators in education and the security services to prioritize school violence and take immediate and effective action. The future of our youth depends on it.

It is unfortunate that school violence overshadows some of the other ills affecting our youth, such as poor reading skills which ultimately affect academic performance. The efforts of non-profit organisations like The National Reading Coalition, the NECT and Na'ibali to not only get the youth, but also adults, to start reading are commendable and supported. It, however, is, and remains, the responsibility of the DBE and provincial education departments to develop and improve these skills in our learners. NAPTOSA wishes to see them embrace this responsibility with greater urgency and commitment, because deficient reading skills impact the ability of the youth to be successful in future.

Equally important to the future of our youth is job creation. We can school them, achieve commendable matric results and encourage them to pursue tertiary education, but without job opportunities all this comes to nothing. Economic growth is therefore imperative.

The youth is fortunately resilient and bound to overcome the present gloom if only South Africa can create a conducive environment where they can flourish and reach their true potential. As always, the country can bank on NAPTOSA members to do what they can to make this happen.

B.L. MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR