



GAUTENG PROVINCE
ROADS AND TRANSPORT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEECH

Speech - Launch of “She Conquers” with Girl Learners from Mamelodi

I am delighted that today we launch a campaign inspired by young people. The name of the campaign is, “She Conquers”.

“She Conquers” is inspired by young women like yourselves who face daily challenges and yet manage to rise above these challenges in life.

Hence, the sub-theme of the campaign is “Still I Rise”, Your circumstance will not define you. I recognize the potential and power young people possess in shaping the future and in influencing those around them. I will echo the words by the late Kofi Anan, “When you empower a woman, you empower a nation”.

I welcome this initiative which I hope will encourage young people to talk about their problems and find solutions to those problems.

We need to create an environment where young people who may be experiencing problems feel comfortable to seek help from family, friends or health and educational professionals.

In this regard, one of the most encouraging findings to emerge from the consultation process which informed the development of this campaign was that many of our teenagers are comfortable to talk about what helps or hurts them to people they trust.

This gives me considerable hope that the tide is turning on the era when young people felt hopeless or seek help from the wrong places.

So, with this campaign we’re launching today, we aim to create discussion not just in the public arena but in homes, schools and communities. Our aim is to stimulate debate.

We want people to ask themselves how they would respond in a variety of situations involving drugs, HIV and AIDS, rape, teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence.

Current research shows that youth between 15 to 24 years have the highest poverty and unemployment rate at around 50 percent. This is your age group category.

Sadly, 30 percent of South African youth are not in schools, not employed or in training. One in eight youth has lost a parent or both, some are growing up in single parent households and some in child-headed homes.

Girls experience the highest levels of crime and violence, including sexual assault. That is our harsh reality. It leaves many with a sense of hopelessness.

We are disturbed by the high rate of HIV infections amongst young girls; pregnancies in girls as young as 12 years old; the high number of young girls dropping out of school and the rate of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by young women.

Young girls should not be addicted to any drug. Young girls should be free from HIV infection. There is no future in 'sugar daddies'. The "She Conquers" campaign aims at addressing these issues.

With this campaign, we hope to keep girls in schools, prevent teenage pregnancy, prevent HIV infections, prevent substance abuse and restore the dignity of young people.

With over half of the global population under the age of 30, it is safe to say that younger generations will find the solutions to some of our toughest global challenges.

We believe in you. My wish for you is that you be the scriptwriter of your destiny and feature yourself as a star that guides the way towards a brighter future.

We admire young people who are concerned with the affairs of their community and nation. My generation faced a different struggle, that of apartheid.

You are the 'born free' generation, but your struggle is different from ours; on a daily basis you must deal with the consequence of AIDS, crime, gender-based violence and abuse.

You should never let your experience, or a negative situation, define you. In life failures should teach us lessons; they should shape us and make us stronger.

You are bigger than your situation. You can direct your destiny. Never stop believing in the power of your ideas, your imagination, your hard work to change the world.

Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid to ask questions. I do that every day. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength and

courage. It shows that you have the courage to admit when you don't know something, and to learn something new.

It makes you human. Have hope, but remember that hope is not blind optimism. It is not ignoring the enormity of the task ahead or the roadblocks that stand in your path. It is not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight.

Hope is that thing inside you that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits you, if you have the courage to reach for it, to work for it, and to fight for it.

Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for you, but by you, by the girl who is not content to settle for the world as it is, who has the courage to remake the world as it should be. Remember, change is brought about because ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Gauteng is committed to providing opportunity for young people to ensure they are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also change agents today. This include ensuring that boys and girls have equal access to equal opportunities, education, building skills to strengthen youth leadership in civil society, business and academia, or providing a young entrepreneur with the capital and network to grow a start-up.

We invest in the potential of the next generation, you are that generation.

I believe that through this initiative, you will work together, learn from one another and effect change in your schools and communities.

You are often the voices at the forefront of change, whether on issues of human rights, technology or healthcare. You understand that change will not come if you wait for some other person or some other time. You are the ones we've been waiting for. Be inspired by what Gandhi had said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

We call upon civil society, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, community organizations, and government departments, to come together and partner with us to ensure the success of this programme. What is exciting is that this campaign follows a multi-sectoral approach.

This is not a Department of Roads and Transport campaign, it is our campaign, your campaign.

It is a campaign by young people for young people. Let us help and empower the young people move Gauteng City Region forward.

Ismail Vadi

MEC for Roads and Transport