



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF EDUCATION 2021

The world will, for the third time, be celebrating International Day of Education on 24 January 2021.

When the Day was initiated in 2019, it was under the theme “Education: A Key Driver for Inclusion and Empowerment”. The spotlight was placed on the plight of millions of children and adults who have, or have had, no, or limited, educational opportunities, causing UNESCO’s Director General to lament “We will not succeed in breaking the cycle of poverty, mitigating climate change, adapting to the technological revolution, let alone achieve gender equality, without ambitious political commitment to universal education.”

The appropriateness of the statement was underscored by the research facts that 262 million children and youth, at that stage, still did not attend school; 617 million children and adolescents could not read and do basic math; children and youth from low-income countries were 50% less likely to complete primary school compared to those from rich countries, while only one-tenth of them were likely to complete secondary school.

The theme for the 2020 celebration, before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, was the progressive “Learning for people, planet, prosperity and peace”. Now, a year later, reference is being made to “a lost generation” with an estimated 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries having been affected by school and university closures and at least 463 million children (a third of the world’s students) who were unable to access any remote learning.

To counter the “lost generation” scenario becoming real, Education International (EI) is calling for education budgets to be protected and increased, and for international aid to be boosted to meet the needs of countries’ education systems, prioritising equity in all recovery efforts. As a member of EI, NAPTOSA fully supports this position.

“Recover and Revitalise Education for the COVID-19 Generation” is the very apt theme for 2021. According to UNESCO, the pandemic has not only amplified social, economic and digital inequalities, but has also been a wake-up call to make education systems more resilient to crisis, and more inclusive, flexible and sustainable in that it has shown the capacity of systems to innovate and the enterprise of teachers to ensure learning while expanding the frontiers of learning possibilities.

It is with a sense of gratification that we acknowledge, on this International Day of Education, the role of NAPTOSA members in the recovery and innovation efforts to keep the South African education system on even keel during the COVID-19 storm. Your sacrifices and resilience in the face of an unprecedented, stressful and hazardous situation are greatly appreciated.

Sadly, we enter the new school year with the same circumstances prevailing, but fortunately we know our members will be there in their frontline positions to give the children of our country the best opportunity of not becoming part of the envisaged “lost generation”.

NAPTOSA will continue the fight for the health and safety of our members at the national and provincial levels. For this, it is crucial that members keep the union (provincial offices) informed of any lapses in these protocols at their schools.

We trust that we will soon see the first COVID-19 vaccines arriving in South Africa and the vaccination roll-out process to start in earnest. With this in mind, we have called on the Ministers of Basic Education and Health to, alongside health workers, also prioritise teachers as recipients of the vaccine.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR