



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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SPECIAL NEEDS: SPECIAL UNDERSTANDING AND FOCUS NEEDED

NAPTOSA condemns police brutality.

On 16 August 2020 the country commemorated the Marikana massacre at the hands of the police and only two weeks later we have this shocking and sad alleged killing by the police of the innocent, and special needs, boy, Nathaniel Julies.

What is truly reprehensible is the attempted cover-up that followed. It is not only a poor reflection on the police service, but also demeaning to persons with special needs. To think that because a special needs child was the victim, any story could be spun to exonerate the police, is loathsome in the extreme.

Nathaniel's case requires us to pause and to reflect on the situation of special needs persons in our society. Yes, we do cater for special needs education, but there are still too few schools to offer adequate schooling for this group of learners. Our teachers who teach in the special schools do an outstanding job to prepare special needs children for post-school life. But where are the work opportunities for these learners once they leave school?

Government-offered sheltered employment that once ensured gainful employment for special needs learners, is no more. Many of these children are reduced to begging and aimlessly roaming the streets.

Why do we not have sheltered employment centres? The answer is simple "The fiscus does not have the funds to set up and maintain these centres". Which again brings the stark reality of the impact of corruption in government sharply into focus. Corruption denies so many of our citizens the opportunity of employment, but when it effects the lives of persons with special needs it is all the more inexcusable.

That there is a general lack of community understanding regarding special needs children is clear. We have a Department of Woman, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, but what are they doing to enhance this understanding in society? We call on government to focus specific attention on the

plight of persons with special needs and to start in their own ranks, because if the police officers involved in the alleged shooting were unable to identify that they were engaging a special needs boy, we have a serious problem in our midst.

The death of Nathaniel Julies at the hands of those we look up to for protection should not have been in vain. NAPTOSA demands that the Minister of Police, the Minister of Woman, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and the Minister of Education to do more, and to pronounce practical steps, to protect these vulnerable members of society and to improve their education and work opportunities.

NAPTOSA believes that every citizen has the right to be on the street without fearing their protectors. After all, we have a police service, not a police force, in this country. We therefore deplore the callous killing of an innocent citizen as well as the attempted cover-up of the incident and wish to see those responsible for these actions be held accountable and brought to book.

Below is a link to join the country-wide denunciation of the police action in this case. We request NAPTOSA members to lend their support to this campaign:

<https://tinyurl.com/justicefornathanieljulies>

BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR