



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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HUMAN RIGHTS DAY: 21 MARCH 2020

A day of reflection?

Human Rights Day 2020 will go down in history as a day of reflection amidst the most trying circumstances.

Who would have thought that a day of celebration would become a day when the assembly of people would be prohibited to safeguard the health of the nation?

South Africa's Constitution guarantees its citizens many rights, inter alia the right to life. We commend government for the action taken to combat the COVID-19 epidemic and to protect the lives of our citizens, although it means that other rights, for the moment, have to take a back seat. For example, the right to movement (travel) and the right of assembly. Even the right to education has been affected by forcing school closures when a term has not yet run its course. But having these rights curbed for the greater good of the nation is totally acceptable and understandable.

NAPTOSA lauds all our members who, despite the potential risks to themselves, stayed on point to serve our children and the school community.

Undermining of labour rights

Not all rights in the Bill of Rights, are, however, at this stage affected by the supremacy of the right to life. We therefore dismiss the State as Employer's attempts to undermine our labour rights. The right to collective bargaining is one of the most fundamental labour rights. The Employer's call for the renegotiation of a concluded collective agreement that is awaiting the final phase of implementation is therefore nothing short of destabilising the collective bargaining regime in the public service.

Failure by the state to honour clause 3.3 of Resolution 1 of 2018 which deals with the salary adjustments, percentages and projected CPI in relation to the 2020/2021 financial year, will be tantamount to a total violation of public servants' rights.

In protecting this right, NAPTOSA will not waver from its position that the State as employer must honour the 2018 wage agreement and implement the agreed wage increase on 1 April 2020.

Unity, socio-economic renewal and nation-building

The theme for this year's Human Rights month is "Unity, socio-economic renewal and nation-building". NAPTOSA fully supports the aspect of socio-economic renewal, but as said many times before, not at the expense of dedicated public servants. Socio-economic renewal should focus on the "bad apples" in the economy – the State-owned Enterprises, the dysfunctional municipalities and the entrenched corruption that appears to continue unabated despite the focus that has been placed on this blight.

NAPTOSA calls on the state as employer to strengthen its governance and deal decisively with cost drivers in the public service such as:

- Litigations
- Cost of office accommodation
- Use of consultants
- Information and communication technology (ICT)
- Irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure, and
- Cadre deployment

As far as unity and nation-building are concerned, NAPTOSA can hold its own with the best of them. In the education sector we remain the union with the most diverse membership, but it has never undermined our unity. The manner in which our members unify under the banner of “Serve with Dignity”, notwithstanding our different backgrounds, views and beliefs, is a shining example of effective nation-building. As a union, we also do not shy away from working with other organisations with whom we might principally differ, if it is for the greater good of our nation or our members. The respect garnered by our diversity and unity has enabled us to play a far more influential role in the education sector than what our size suggests.

Teachers are human too

Teachers are human too and their rights must be respected. Teachers have been experiencing an increasing prevalence of violence in schools. The fact that teachers are regularly subjected to physical and verbal attacks on school premises can no longer be swept under the carpet and attributed to youth who come from dysfunctional families and have lost hope in the future.

Some schools have an average class size of 60 pupils or more per class. In some cases, one teacher has up to four different grades at the same time in his/her class. In very large classes, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to detect which pupil is able to master the curriculum and which needs help.

Teachers are often blamed for anything that goes wrong in education. When learning outcomes are bad, teachers are blamed; when learners fall into pit toilets, it is because teachers were not supervising them. Violence against teachers is escalating. It is becoming fashionable for teachers to be assaulted and killed, and yet there’s much talk about human rights in an environment where teachers do not feel safe. This rhetoric must come to an end. The state must create an enabling environment for teachers to teach, and for learners to learn. The dignity of our teachers must be restored.

Rural schools need urgent attention

In their article, “Teachers for rural schools - a challenge for South Africa”, (*S. Afr. j. educ. vol.39 suppl.1 Pretoria Sep. 2019*) professors Pierre du Plessis and Raj Mestry from the University of Johannesburg argue that after 25 years of democracy, educational standards and learner performance in rural schooling has shown little improvement. Their research findings reveal that most rural schools do not have water, sanitation, or electricity, and classrooms are in a terrible state. These issues have serious implications for effective teaching and learning. Teachers and learners cannot forever be subjected to such appalling conditions when the state is promoting a human rights culture.

In closing, it is the hope and prayer of the leadership of NAPTOSA that our members should be safe during these extraordinary times and that members will utilise the extended holiday period to rest well, for the new term will undoubtedly bring with it added pressures.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR