

**MEETING OF THE
NATIONAL AFRICAN TEACHER'S UNION
ADDRESS BY
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Curries Fountain Stadium, Durban: April 30, 1999**

It gives me great pleasure to meet with the National African Teacher's Union. I have been on the campaign trail for several months and I have met with many professional associations, communities and South Africans from all walks of life. However, I feel that this meeting is of unequal importance for me. Teachers are the most important factor in the complex formula of the present and future well being of our society. Teachers carry the heavy responsibility of forging our future and toiling with the most precious of all things we have, our children.

I have maintained a longstanding dialogue with South African teachers. I have always held your profession in the highest possible esteem. I have had good teachers while in school and I ascribe many of the successes I have had in life to this good fortune.

The dialogue I began with my teachers while in school has continued throughout my life, even though at times this dialogue has been fed only by the memories of the past which are kept alive within my recollection. I have come here to foster the dialogue I have always had with teachers and to hear what teachers need to provide a greater contribution to the making of a new South Africa.

I wish to hear from you what government can do to make education the priority it must be. You know that, during this electoral campaign, my Party and I have made an absolute commitment to strengthen the importance of education in the next

government. Our slogan is indeed education, education and education. This is not a new commitment for me and for my Party. You will remember that while other segments of the liberation movement rallied behind the slogan of "Liberation now, education later", I took exception to it. I believe that liberation should walk with the legs of education and that genuine liberation can only come through education. At the time, I conducted my contribution to our struggle for liberation under the slogan of "Education for liberation".

You will remember how I was ostracised when I objected to the campaign fuelled by certain segments of the liberation struggle which brought chaos and destruction into our black schools, creating a generation which lost invaluable education opportunities. That was the beginning of a culture of rebellion which is still alive within our schools. We need to work together to create a new culture of learning and commitment which once and for all closes the chapter of rebellion, lack of discipline and lack of respect in our education system.

The lessons of the past show that strategic mistakes will produce negative consequences many years after their time. When we are dealing with education, we are bound to follow the intended and unintended consequences of our decisions far into the future. I know that erroneous decisions affecting today's children will reverberate into the make up of our society long after my time is past. For this reason, I know that in education we cannot afford the luxury of second chances and we must get it right the first time. In order to do so, we must listen to the voice of teachers.

I believe that not enough is being done about education. I know that we have to face enormous difficulties and that, in many provinces such as KwaZulu Natal, we had to perform the monumental task of integrating as many as six education departments which were previously separate and divided. I also know that what has been done has, in most cases, been moved by the best intentions and most well meaning policies. However, as teachers will point out to their students, good intentions are not good enough when they are not reflected by positive results. We must accept that the results of the education system are not good enough and something must be done about them.

The realisation that the present poor situation of education is dramatic remains, in my mind, the first and foremost step we must undertake. The public knows that our education system is in shambles, and so do parents, children and teachers. We have reached and long acknowledged this unsettling realisation. However, there are still many people within the circles of government who are denying the gravity of the problem. It is almost as if they are plunged into a syndrome of denial in which their good intentions become confused with the facts of reality.

We cannot make progress unless the result of the next elections sends a clear message which awakens the senses of those who are still not seeing the magnitude of the problem. Unless this message comes across loud and clear, the policies and the directives made by the central government are bound to remain the same and we shall endure five more years of the same. In our education system, we need five years of something qualitatively better.

I believe that only my Party can bring about a better alternative to education as well as to other important areas which are high in the mind of the electorate, such as criminality and unemployment. I have often likened the next elections to the first and most important report card written by the people about their government. If we do not want five more years of the same, but we wish for something better, this message must show on the report card.


A vote for the ruling party will keep things as they are and so will a vote for the opposition, for the opposition has no power to change the way things are and, if they were not heard until now, they have no better chance of being heard in the future. We need to ensure that teachers can be heard and that the IFP is strengthened to be able to provide a contribution to the next government which will make the voice of teachers, parents and learners of goodwill heard and listened to.

The problems with education are solvable and can be solved but it will take political will to do so. After elections, I wish to give my personal contribution to bring this political will to the fore. You have seen how we have given priority attention to education in the province of KwaZulu Natal and we are proud that both the Premier of the province Mr LPHM Mtshali and the Minister of Education Miss EEN kaNkosi-Shandu are experienced educationalists. Without the political will to make education a real priority, the solution to the problems confronting teachers, parents and children will not materialise. Political will developed from the top layers of government must carry through the entire education system and reach into the classrooms.

The next government will need to have the required leadership, charisma and credibility to motivate teachers and students alike and create a general climate of law, order, respect for discipline and authority, and social stability which will make itself felt even within classrooms. Classrooms are bound to mirror the communities they serve and for as long as chaos reigns in our communities, chaos is bound to have a free hand within our classrooms as well.

Most of all, it is important that we all accept that the road towards improvement and upliftment in education is uphill and filled with difficult decisions demanding courage and determination. The easy thing to do would be to leave things as they are. I am committed to do what I can so that together we can choose the hard option rather than the easy one and begin working together to make things better.

We must turn the tide. Let us be harsh with ourselves and accept that the matric results are too low, the administration of the schools too ineffective, the distribution of text books too chaotic, often the training of teachers is insufficient and the education we deliver is often not sufficiently relevant and formative. We need to go back to basics and put our policy emphasis on the three fundamental elements of an education system, namely, qualified and well trained teachers, good quality books and other educational material and, finally, adequate classrooms. We must rethink the structure of our education system beginning from the needs arising out of the classroom, and strengthen policy emphasis on books, teachers and classrooms. It is shocking that a country with a level of prosperity and *pro capita* income such as ours is not capable of providing all its children with the required text books.



The system of education is a mixture of public administration and productive units. Undoubtedly, the various schools which are the productive units of this system require the infrastructure provided by the public administration. However, we need to shift emphasis away from the public administration segment of the system to focus on its productive units. Too much of the resources allocated to our education system are spent on the administrative side, especially in respect of the top layers of government, and too little is allocated where it counts the most, namely, in paying for teachers training and salaries, educational equipment and good quality classrooms.

I believe that an essential step of a proper educational reform is the reallocation of resources, thinning out the top layers of government and administration. After all, private schools operate as well as, if not better than, public schools and they are self contained units without the massive administrative infrastructure supporting, but also often hindering, the activities of public schools.

Once more resources are available, we will need to proceed to create real equity across all segments of the public education system. At present there is unjustified inequity in the distribution of resources within each province. It is very saddening that in KwaZulu Natal the funding allocated per student is about twenty percent lower than the national average. The present under funding of 1.6 billion rand of the KwaZulu Natal education system compounds problems which accumulated for almost two decades during which both the education system of the erstwhile KwaZulu Government, as well as that of the erstwhile province of Natal, were under funded.

We were under funded as a form of punishment because of my opposition to apartheid and the unwillingness of the province of Natal to embrace the full measure of Afrikaans acculturation imposed by Pretoria. It would have been equitable to give to KwaZulu Natal an even greater share of national revenues for education so as to compensate for the under funding of the past, and it remains unconscionable that this under funding continues even under the present democratic government. I have raised this matter in Cabinet on several occasions and I remain committed to do what I can to ensure that it be rectified after elections.

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We must also look into the inequalities of resources within each province which reflect the unequal patterns of ~~special~~ *SPATIAL* development which were dictated by apartheid. We have inherited schools which have more resources than others and we are now witnessing a situation in which both these types of schools are equally threatened by the unintended consequences of this continuing imbalance. More affluent students from communities served by less resourced schools are moving to attend more resourced schools, depriving their communities and their schools of the financial contributions they could make toward their upliftment, while stretching the capacity of better resourced schools to deliver adequately. We must solve these imbalances by having the courage of concentrating resources where they are most needed so as to make schools which at present have less resources more attractive to students and parents.

Across the board we must build a system in which equity and equal distribution of resources begins redressing the problems created by the present imbalances.

Teachers must be part of this process once, together, we manage to create the necessary political will to get this process started. We must create the political will to direct resources towards the better training and qualification of teachers. Many teachers will need to accept the necessity of undertaking additional training.

If we wish to change the quality of our educational output, we must improve on the training of teachers. The challenges confronting our education system require the broadening of the notion of education beyond the traditional parameters of a school curriculum. Teachers are forced to supplement the education which children can no longer receive in dysfunctional families or in communities which are characterised by a breakdown in their social fibre.

Under these conditions, teachers must learn how to exercise their leadership to teach discipline, self respect, human values and the important measure of civic education which must be imparted on all of our citizens at the earliest possible age. The notions of law, order, civilisation and fundamental human values are either acquired at the early stages of a person's formation, or are often never fully understood and interiorised. In this respect, it undoubtedly remains true that the child is the father of the man, as once noted by Wordsworth. What one does or does not learn during childhood will shape forever his or her adulthood. Furthermore, we must accept that most of the people of our country have been exposed for the first time to knowledge, information and experiences from which they have been detached by the artificial barriers of apartheid.

Schools are bound to become centres of information, growth and knowledge, not only

for the students but also for their families and communities. What is learned in schools is bound to reverberate into all communities, bringing about the necessary cultural revolution which we need across the board in all our communities. Apartheid did not prevent the circulation of knowledge and information only within black communities, but had the effect of isolating white communities into a cocoon of bigotry and misinformation. All our communities are now open to the information of the world in an age of rapid globalization. Now, as never before, any piece of information available anywhere in the world can be acquired by anyone in the world.

Teachers are bound to become the *avant gard* of this cultural revolution which promises to bring greater freedom within our land. In order to do so, teachers themselves will need to accept the discipline of further stages of training, exposure and human growth, even beyond the parameters of what government can provide. For instance, I would be surprised if any teacher of today is not computer literate and, of his own accord, does not spend a substantial amount of time surfing the vast sea of endless information available on the world wide web.

We need to make this type of personal contribution to promote human growth beyond the parameters of existing curricula, existing training opportunities and even the walls of our schools. South Africa needs to expand its educational efforts into new frontiers in order to free the great majority of its people which unfortunately remains enslaved under the yoke of ignorance and superstition for lack of education, exposure and experience.

I have often called on the next government to become the champion of a genuine revolution of goodwill. Education must be the fulcrum of this revolution and it must begin at school level. It is within schools that children must reject the violence and lawlessness which characterise our communities and accept the social discipline to make society workable. It is within schools that children must accept to respect their neighbours and understand and interiorise the pool of human values which will prevent them once they are adults from engaging in conduct abhorrent to our shared humanity.

I cannot help thinking that in our country a woman is raped every 50 seconds and that we cannot even count the amount of women who are subject to family abuse and violence from those who should have the responsibility of loving and nourishing them. The values of respect for the opposite sex should be acquired within a family and a community, but if these fail, it is only within schools that the arduous task of forging decent human beings can be accomplished. Teachers must grow and requalify their own knowledge in order to also become teachers of life and humanity.

However, we cannot leave teachers alone in the tremendous tasks which historical circumstances have bestowed upon their shoulders. The IFP believes that communities must participate in the administration of schools and that teachers and parents must be encouraged to form partnerships for education. A new culture of teaching must be matched with a new culture of learning where the importance of learning is understood not only by students, but also by their parents and their communities. Together, we must form a partnership to encourage people to accept the value of discipline. Discipline cannot be foisted on people when it is rejected by large segments of our

population. No teacher can deal with a classroom in which the majority of the students are problematic.

I believe that education should become the main focus of the next government in more than one way. The next government will need to champion a national drive to enable people to access and interiorize knowledge and information. This drive to develop and uplift our country's human resources cannot be the exclusive responsibility of government, nor the exclusive responsibility of the Department of Education. Each department of government, each branch of government and each level of government will need to participate in a joint effort to educate our people.

The Department of Health will need to reach out more to teach people hygiene, preventive health care and the basic facts of human biology. The Department of Transport will need to educate people about motor vehicle safety. The Department of Trade and Industry will need to educate our people to become consumers and protagonists in the world of trade and commerce.

We cannot prosper for as long as the majority of our people does not understand the basic facts of commercial transactions which they enter into every day as consumers, or they do not know how to open a cheque account. We cannot prosper for as long as the majority of our people does not know how to interface with basic services provided to them by government. Especially local government will need to carry the responsibility to educate communities about the functioning, accessibility and use of public services.

We need adult education, civic education, consumer education, health education, family education, basic legal education, professional training, vocational training and a nationwide campaign of literacy to transform the majority of our people into viable citizens of the world in the third millennium. This effort must be undertaken jointly by government, business and all organs of civil society. The next government will need to spearhead these joint efforts and encourage employers to make educational material and courses available to their employees.

We will need to rebuild the infrastructure of our territory to support this educational effort so that communities can access not only libraries but also Internet outlets and centers of information and human growth development. We must also set ourselves the goal of ensuring that all our population may become computer literate within the next ten years and may leapfrog over intermediate stages of education which it did not have the benefit of receiving.

Within a new national climate striving for and towards education, the job of teachers and schools will become simpler. A national campaign for education will also create the parameters to deal with the most difficult of all issues in education, which is the issue of relevance. Education must be relevant and only society and the rapidly changing times in which we live can determine what is and what is not relevant. We know from experience that, at times, government is like the proverbial owl of minerva which can only rise in flight at the end of a day looking backward on the twilight of an already completed day.

The debate on relevance must look forward into the future. For this reason, the education system needs to become more integrated with the needs of society, the demands of the market place and the desire of students and parents. We need more flexibility in our education system which undoubtedly will create additional strain in demands for teachers. However, we all have the responsibility of giving our children the greatest value in their education.

In my remarks, I have often made reference to the next government because I sincerely hope that it will have the benefit of the inputs of a much stronger IFP which has received a landslide mandate from the people to make education the priority of government. Education is a cornerstone of our revolution of goodwill, but this priority calls for discipline and possible sacrifices. We can no longer tolerate the confusion and lack of discipline in many of our schools. Together we must ensure that schools finally become the place where teachers teach and learners learn.

Schools must become the engine of a genuine revolution of goodwill which uplifts our society. It is a heavy responsibility which can only be carried forward by those heros and heroines who have made the choice of dedicating their lives to the most noble of all human activities, that of transferring knowledge from one generation to another. I salute the teachers of South Africa and I pledge to them my unwavering commitment to do whatever is in my power to ensure that, together, we can succeed in fulfilling the noble mission to which teachers have dedicated their lives.

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