INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

BY CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER SY MAMABOLO

AT THE LAUNCH OF SCHOOLS DEMOCRACY WEEK 2018

KWAMHLANGA SHOW GROUNDS

17 APRIL 2018

WELCOME

- Thank you Programme Director Ms Reitumetse Rapulane

- The Honourable Minister of Basic Education Ms Angie Motshekga

- The Honourable MEC for Education in Mpumalanga Mr Sibusiso Malaza

- Her Worship the District Mayor of Nkangala Councillor Linah Malatjie

- The Vice Chairperson of the Electoral Commission Mr Terry Tselane
• Members of the Department of Basic Education and members of the Electoral Commission

• Teachers, pupils and Members of the media and other stakeholders present today

• Honoured guests, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

• Having acknowledged and greeted the dignitaries, let me now welcome the most important people here today – the young people of Mpumalanga South Africa

• It is an honour to be with you here today and a privilege to experience your warm hospitality and your beautiful singing

• The passion with which you sang our national anthem is an inspiration to us all and reminds us of the pride with which we should all feel for our country

• The reason we are here today is because of you, the young people who are the future of our country and the future of our democracy

BACKGROUND TO SCHOOLS DEMOCRACY WEEK

• Honourable guests

• We are here today to launch our sixth annual Schools Democracy Week – a joint initiative between the Electoral Commission and the Department of Basic Education
The Schools Democracy programme started in 2013, in the run-up to the 2014 National and Provincial Elections, when we signed a three-year memorandum of agreement with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to facilitate the teaching of civic and democracy education within schools across the country.

This collaboration between the Electoral Commission and the Department of Basic Education has grown from strength to strength and has become a highlight of our annual calendar of outreach and education activities.

When we conceived of the concept of a week within the school calendar which would focus on democracy and voter education, our intention was to increase youth voter registration and participation by young people in elections.

That remains a key outcome.

**THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF SCHOOLS DEMOCRACY WEEK**

- But Schools Democracy Week is about much more than teaching young learners about how to register as a voter and how to mark a ballot paper.

- The project was born out of a deeper desire to entrench the core values and rights of our Constitution in the youth of our country and to promote responsible citizenship among all South Africans.
• It is no coincidence that Schools Democracy Week is held during the week in which we celebrate Freedom Day on the 27th of April each year

• That date has a special place in every South African’s heart – and especially for us at the Electoral Commission

• It is the day when in 1994 tens of millions of South Africans of all races and genders, South Africa of every socio-economic status and background, of every tribe and culture, of every language group and every religious belief, and of every political persuasion stood shoulder-to-shoulder in long lines in the hot sun to vote together for the first time ever

• But that day 24 years ago was more than about voting

• It was about choosing a new and different future for our country and our children

• Schools Democracy Week is also about more than voter education and learning about how to register as a voter and how to complete a ballot paper

• At the heart of this initiative is entrenching the values and rights of our Constitution and promoting responsible and participative citizenship among all South Africans

• Left undefended and unsupported, democratic gains can too quickly and easily be undone and reversed
In order to flourish and thrive, democracy requires constant nurturing and attention, constant defence against those who would undermine the gains we have made for their own selfish interests.

Young South Africans, the task of each new generation is to build on the foundations laid by those who came before.

When your time comes take over the responsibility for defending our Constitution and nurturing our democracy, we hope you will pick up where we have left off and continue this journey.

And we hope too that you will find our Constitution, its institutions and its values intact and in good condition.

That is our generation’s responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Defending democracy is not the job of any one institution alone – neither the Electoral Commission nor the South African Human Rights Commission nor the Public Protector or any other of the Constitutional institutions.

Nor is it the job of government alone.

It is a task for each and every South Africa, for each and every stakeholder in our electoral democracy, public and private sector, civil society and the media, young and old.
• Only by working together can we continue to advance the gains we have made over the past 24 years

• It is for this reason that we as the Electoral Commission are deeply grateful for the support and partnership of the Minister, the provincial MECs and National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education

• Your support for this project has allowed it to expand and grow and has seen it touch the lives of thousands of young South Africans over the past five years

• With your continued support and commitment we hope to see this initiative touch many thousands more lives in the coming years

• Distinguished guests

• The Schools Democracy initiative is the embodiment of the preamble to our Constitution which was recited with such enthusiasm earlier

• It is about recognizing the past, and laying the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is protected by law

• May God protect our people and our democracy

• Nkosi Sikelel ‘iAfrica

• God bless South Africa
• I thank you