ADDRESS BY VICE CHAIRPERSON TERRY TSELANE
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 Chief Electoral Officer Mr Sy Mamabolo and members of the Electoral Commission
• Members of the Department of Basic Education, principals, teachers and students

• Honoured guests, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEMOCRACY

• Young people and their role in democracy in our country are a particular passion of mine

• My roots in political activism in South Africa were born out of the student uprisings of 1976 when I was still at school and left a deep and lasting impression on me

• 10 years later I found myself expelled from the University of Bophuthatswana (now University of North West) in terms of the Internal Security Act along with many other student activists

• I was honoured to serve as President of the Black Student Society at Wits University and later was a member of the Council of the University

• But my involvement in student activism did not end in the 1980s or 1990s

• I have continued to take an active interest in student politics and have worked alongside many other former student leaders and activists in seeking to find solutions for the various student protests which emerged over the past few years
• And of course, during my many years at the Electoral Commission and in serving on various international election bodies I have always sought to promote the participation and inclusion of young people in electoral democracy

• When it comes to young people and election there is one word which comes up all the time not only here but around the world: apathy

• Apparently young people are apathetic when it comes to getting involved in electoral democracy

• They don’t want to register and they don’t want to vote

• Our own statistics at the Electoral Commission seem to support this notion of an apathetic youth who are disinterested in politics and elections

• While the number of registered voters under 30 years old grew by about 275 000 between 2011 and adjusting for population growth means that there has been a decline in registration by young people

• In simple terms, voter registration for voters younger than 30 years old grew just 4.6 percent compared to an average increase of 11.3 percent for all other age segments over the past five years

• And voter registration for young people under 30 remains the lowest for all age groups in the country - out of an estimated
eligible voting population of 11.88 million 18 to 29 year olds, just 6.28 million (about 53%) were registered for the 2016 Municipal Elections

- But when we talk to young people and look at research and surveys a different picture emerges

- The results of an *Afrobarometer* survey released last year show that a majority of South African youth remain interested in public affairs and discuss politics at least occasionally

- According to the survey 55 percent of South African youth say they are “somewhat” or “very” interested in public affairs and 73 percent say they discuss politics at least “occasionally”

- Half say they attended a community meeting and one third joined others to raise an issue

- You just need to look on Twitter or other social media channels to see that young people are actively engaged in a wide range of socio-economic and politics issues in our country and the world

- And the student protests of recent years – and involvement by young people in other community protests – shows that our youth are anything but disinterested

- So why is this interest in politics and current events not translating into an increase in voter registration and participation by young people?
• Research that we have conducted at the IEC and other international research shows that young people are not apathetic when it comes to political, social and economic issues – but they are disillusioned with mainstream politics and government

• Quite simply they feel let down by elections and many older established political parties

• They think they are not listened to and that they simply serve as voting fodder for political parties which quickly forget about youth issues as soon as the elections are over

• When we asked young people why they didn’t vote in elections, these are some of the answers they told us:
  
  • *It won’t make any difference*
  
  • *No one really cares about youth issues*
  
  • *Politicians are only in it for themselves*
  
  • I think that young people have a point but I would like to list eight reasons why I think that every young person who is eligible to vote should do so in the next election

  • **Reason number 1: Because young people can change the outcome**

  • South Africa has one of the youngest populations in the world – According to the most recent Statistics South Africa Mid-Year
Population Estimates published in August 2017, over 30 percent of the population is aged younger than 15 years and over 58 percent are under 30 years old.

- The single largest age group of voting age population are those aged 20 – 29 who comprise an estimated 10.8 million people or

- That means young people have in their hands the power to determine the outcome of an election – if they just use this power at voting stations

- **Reason number 2: Because no one cares about youth issues except the youth**

- Statistics show that older voters are more likely to vote – which means their concerns and issues are likely to dominate the political agenda

- By exercising their considerable voting power, young people would make sure that issues of relevance and importance to them are placed – and kept – on the agenda

- No one cares about young people more than young voters!

- **Reason number 3: If you don’t vote, you can’t complain!**

- If you don’t vote then you get stuck with other people’s choices – and you can’t even complain about it because you let it happen
• By participating in the electoral process – as voters, candidates, activists and observers – you get a say not only in elections but for the next five years in how things are done

• If you don’t you hand your choice to someone who may choose Donald Trump!

• **Reason number 4: Because you can!**

• You may take your right to vote and all other rights in our Constitution for granted but 25 years ago most of the people in this room were not allowed to vote. Your parents were not allowed to vote and your grandparents were not allowed to vote.

• Many of them were arrested and jailed for demanding this most basic human right. Others were tortured and killed.

• You can vote. Simply by presenting yourself at a registration station with your ID during a registration event puts you on the voters’ roll for life – and let’s you vote in every general and by-election in your area

• **Reason number 5: Democracy needs you!**

• Democracy only works if people participate. That sounds obvious but unless people actively participate in the process, democracy doesn't work and you get something less and something worse. It takes constant renewal to make democracy flourish.
• Reason number 6: There has never been a generation with more information about politics and elections

Technology and connectivity means that your generation is probably the best informed and best equipped to vote in history. Social media is giving you access to information which previous generations of voters didn’t – and still don’t have. You are becoming the experts ahead of your parents. You need to use that expertise to make sure our country heads in the right direction.

• Reason number 7: FOMO – Fear of Missing Out!

Voting is pretty cool – and if your friends are all tweeting from the voting station on voting day you’re going to feel like the odd one out. Be cool – vote!

• Reason number 8: Five years is a long time with an old phone!

If you’re thinking that right now you’ve got better things to do with your time and you’ll vote next time, think again! Five years is a long time to be stuck with something you don’t want or that doesn’t work. Just imagine what it would be like to be stuck with the same cellphone for five years…especially one with limited features. Just think how many phone upgrades you are going to get before you get the chance to upgrade your government!

CONCLUSION

• Honoured guests, young South Africans
• Helping to choose the future path of a country is an enormous responsibility given to every South African citizen

• Because it is so important and has such consequences for everyone it is only given to citizens when they turn 18

• Voting in an election is one of the signs that you are old enough to make your own decisions

• It’s about your independence. It’s about your responsibility. It’s about your future and our future together.

• I hope that every one of you uses it and uses it wisely

• I thank you